



Pena International Journal of Modern Law, Policy and Governance

Journal homepage:
<https://penacendekia.com.my/index.php/pijmlpg/index>
ISSN: 3120-3124



Developing Conceptual Improvement Strategies for Drug Abuse Prevention Awareness Modules

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 January 2026

Received in revised form 25 February 2026

Accepted 25 May 2026

Available online 8 June 2026

Keywords:

Drug abuse; adolescents; children; prevention awareness modules

ABSTRACT

Drug abuse among adolescents and children poses significant threats to social well-being, national security, and development in our country. Despite various prevention, enforcement, and rehabilitation initiatives, adolescents remain highly vulnerable. In this paper, the drug preventions modules applied in Malaysia have been evaluated. Thus, the study is aimed to explore drug-related issues among adolescents and children; and to develop improvement strategies for existing drug prevention awareness modules. A conceptual research method was employed, synthesizing literature, theoretical frameworks, and existing program evaluations to identify gaps and inform module enhancement. The analysis revealed multi-level vulnerabilities at the individual, family, school, and community levels and several weaknesses of the drug abuse prevention modules had been identified that led to the ineffective strategies to minimize the cases of the drug abuses among young aged. Hence, the proposed multi-level conceptual framework is significantly contributed to national policy and improvement adolescents' welfare.

1. Introduction

Drug abuse remains one of the most serious threats to national security, social well-being, and national development. It continues to pose a major challenge that can undermine national stability [15]. Drug abuse among adolescents and children remains a critical public health and social concern globally. Early initiation into substance use has been associated with long-term negative outcomes, including academic failure, mental health disorders, criminal involvement, and social marginalization [16]. The adolescents aged 13 to 18 years accounted for 776 cases, while at least one case involving children under the age of 12 was detected during the same period. National statistics further indicate that more than 60% of the 192,857 drug addicts identified nationwide were youths, underscoring

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that young people constitute the primary target group within Malaysia's drug abuse cycle [15]. The trend of drug abuse among school students has also become increasingly concerning. Reports by the National Anti-Drugs Agency recorded 10,456 drug abuse cases involving school pupils and students between 2020 and 2023. These data clearly demonstrate that drug abuse is not only persistent but increasingly severe among students, including those at the primary school level [17]. Methamphetamine remains the most commonly abused synthetic drug and cases involving primary school children further indicate the growing severity and spread of drug abuse [3]. Despite the implementation of various prevention, enforcement, and rehabilitation initiatives, current statistics indicate that adolescents have increasingly become the primary targets within the cycle of drug abuse. This situation is deeply concerning, as adolescents represent a vital national asset and the future leaders of the country.

In Malaysia, this issue has yet to demonstrate a significant decline, particularly among adolescents and children. Young people are increasingly exposed to negative influences, including the use of illicit substances such as methamphetamine (syabu), cannabis, and yaba pills (pil kuda). This alarming trend necessitates immediate, evidence-based intervention. Reports further indicate that the spread of synthetic drugs has become increasingly severe, extending even to primary school children. This situation reflects failures in early intervention as well as the limited effectiveness of existing drug prevention awareness modules in addressing current realities.

The existence of various drug prevention awareness modules implemented through schools, communities, and governmental agencies, concerns persist regarding their effectiveness, sustainability, and cultural relevance. Many existing initiatives emphasize information dissemination rather than holistic prevention, often neglecting the complex interaction between individual, familial, educational, and socio-cultural factors influencing youth behaviour. This situation highlights failures in early intervention and the limited effectiveness of existing drug prevention awareness modules in addressing current challenges. Programs such as Drug Abuse Prevention Education (PPDa), Anti-Drug Peer Volunteers (RADA), Community Empowerment Towards Drug-Free Communities (KOMITED), and the Cure & Care (C&C) Program have yet to effectively curb drug proliferation, particularly among adolescents and children in rural and high-risk communities [9]. The approaches employed often fail to adequately consider the unique cultural, social, and geographical factors of local communities, while also providing limited opportunities for youth to act as agents of change within their own communities [18]. This is indicating the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and improved prevention strategies.

This issue must not be taken lightly, as it reflects a breakdown in values, negative peer influence, and insufficient early preventive intervention among adolescents. Existing drug prevention awareness modules often emphasize general information dissemination without sufficiently addressing the contextual realities faced by adolescents and children in specific regions. The adolescent drug vulnerability remains a critical challenge to the national security and social well-being despite of the implementation of various prevention and rehabilitation initiatives in Malaysia. The current prevention modules often fail to address the complex, multi-level factors of the problem, leaving a significant research gap in how these programs can be holistically integrated across individual and community spheres. Hence, the objectives of this study are to explore the underlying drug-related issues among adolescents and children while identifying weaknesses in existing awareness modules to develop improvement strategies. By proposing a multi-level conceptual framework that integrates several factors such as family, school and policy support, this study is significant as it provides a strategic blueprint for policymakers and academicians to enhance the effectiveness of drug prevention effort and ultimately reduce the prevalence of drug abuse among the young people.

1.1 Conceptual Background and Key Definitions

Drug-related issues in this paper refer not only to drug use but also to exposure, susceptibility, and risk factors associated with substance abuse among adolescents and children. Adolescents and children are defined as individuals below the age of 18 who are in critical stages of cognitive, emotional, and social development, rendering them particularly vulnerable to risky behaviors. Specifically, the adolescents are aged between 13 to 18 years old and children are below 12 years old.

Drug prevention awareness modules are conceptualized as structured educational and community-based interventions aimed at increasing knowledge, shaping attitudes, and strengthening protective behaviors. Understanding these concepts is essential for exploring the nature of drug-related issues and identifying areas requiring improvement in prevention strategies.

1.2 Theoretical Foundations

The exploration of drug-related issues among adolescents and children is informed by several theoretical perspectives. **Social Learning Theory** explains how exposure to drug-using peers and adults increases the likelihood of experimentation [2]. It posits that adolescents learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement, particularly from peers and significant adults. **Ecological Systems Theory** highlights how individual behavior is influenced by interactions across family, school, and community contexts [5]. Otherwise, this theory emphasizes that child development is influenced by multiple interconnected systems, including social factors such as family, school, community, and broader societal contexts. Drug use cannot be understood in isolation from these environments.

Theory of Planned Behavior emphasizes the role of attitudes, perceived norms, and perceived control in shaping drug-related decisions [16]. **Risk and Protective Factors Theory** provides a lens for identifying conditions that increase vulnerability or resilience [16]. Also, this theory highlights that substance use emerges from the interaction between risk factors (e.g., peer pressure, weak family bonds) and protective factors (e.g., parental supervision, religious values).

These theories collectively support Objective 1 by explaining the mechanisms underlying drug-related issues and inform Objective 2 by guiding the design of more effective prevention strategies.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual paper methodology is appropriate for advancing theoretical understanding and proposing improvement strategies in contexts where empirical evidence is fragmented or insufficient. Rather than generating primary data, the paper relies on systematic conceptual exploration, theory synthesis, and critical analysis of existing literature to address the stated objectives. This approach is also has been identify by Jaakkola [6] as one of the ways to produce conceptual papers. The explicit mapping of study objectives to manuscript sections ensures methodological transparency and conceptual rigor by demonstrating how each objective is systematically addressed throughout the paper. Such an approach is consistent with best practices in conceptual scholarship, where clarity of purpose, logical structure, and theoretical coherence are central criteria for scholarly contribution.

The objective mapping further strengthens the internal validity of the paper by aligning the exploration of drug-related issues (Objective 1) with the subsequent development of improvement strategies for drug prevention awareness modules (Objective 2). Table 1 shows the structure of this article based on the objective mapping.

Table 1
 Objective mapping of study objectives to article sections

Study Objective	Article Section	How the Objective is Addressed
Objective 1: To explore drug-related issues among adolescents and children	Introduction	Establishes the context, significance, and rationale for examining drug-related issues among adolescents and children in Kelantan.
	Conceptual Background and Key Definitions	Clarifies key concepts related to drug abuse, prevention, and youth vulnerability to support conceptual exploration.
	Theoretical Foundations	Uses relevant theories to explain the mechanisms underlying drug-related issues among adolescents and children.
	Conceptual Exploration of Drug-Related Issues among Adolescents and Children in Kelantan	Provides a multi-level conceptual analysis (individual, family, school, and community) of drug-related issues.
Objective 2: To develop improvement strategies based on existing drug prevention awareness modules	Conceptual Review of Existing Drug Prevention Awareness Modules	Identifies conceptual strengths and gaps in existing prevention modules that require improvement.
	Proposed Improvement Strategies: A Conceptual Framework for Enhanced Drug Prevention Awareness	Develops a multi-level conceptual framework outlining improvement strategies for existing drug prevention awareness modules.
	Implications of the Proposed Improvement Strategies	Discusses theoretical, practical, and policy implications of the proposed improvement strategies.
	Directions for Future Research	Recommends future empirical studies to test and refine the proposed strategies.
Objectives 1 & 2 (Integrated)	Conclusion	Synthesizes the exploration of drug-related issues and the development of improvement strategies into a coherent conceptual contribution.

3. Results

3.1 Conceptual Exploration of Drug-Related Issues among Adolescents and Children

Drug-related issues among adolescents and children can be conceptually understood across multiple levels. At the **individual level**, curiosity, emotional vulnerability, and limited refusal skills increase susceptibility [16]. At the **family level**, inadequate parental supervision and weak communication contribute to risk [5]. **School-related issues** include peer influence, school disengagement, and limited preventive programming [15]. At the **community and socio-cultural level**, accessibility to drugs, peer networks, and environmental exposure shape behavior [4]. This conceptual exploration highlights the multifaceted nature of drug-related issues, fulfilling Objective 1.

3.2 Conceptual Review of Existing Drug Prevention Awareness Modules

Existing drug prevention awareness modules typically focus on increasing knowledge about drug types, health consequences, and legal implications. While such content is important, conceptual

analysis reveals limitations in addressing the complex and contextual factors influencing adolescents and children in Malaysia.

Key conceptual gaps include limited family involvement, insufficient cultural adaptation, minimal emphasis on skill development, and weak community engagement. These gaps suggest the need for improvement strategies that move beyond information-based approaches, thus linking the exploration of drug-related issues (Objective 1) with the development of improvement strategies (Objective 2). Therefore, it is important to review the existing of drug abuse prevention modules in Malaysia. The analysis indicates the strengths and weaknesses of the existing modules as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Review of existing drug abuse prevention modules

Program	Module	Strengths	Weaknesses
Intervention Program	The <i>Community Empowerment Towards Drug-Free Communities (KOMITED)</i> module targets residents living in high-risk drug areas. The module emphasizes community education, social intervention, family-oriented activities, and community engagement. Its implementation involves collaboration among the National Anti-Drugs Agency (AADK), Village Development and Security Committees (JKKK), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities [1]	1) Promotes community ownership and active engagement in drug prevention. 2) Encourage multi-stakeholder collaboration	1) Limited empirical evidence on outcomes and behavioral impact. 2) Generalized implementation without specific age group 3) Insufficient integration of cultural and contextual factors (socioeconomic/geographic)
Education / Counselling	<i>Drug Abuse Prevention Education (PPDa)</i> is implemented in primary and secondary schools by the Ministry of Education Malaysia and the National Anti-Drugs Agency. The program utilizes structured modules aimed at strengthening students' identity formation and awareness of drug dangers. Activities include talks, murals, quizzes, essay and poster competitions, and drug exhibitions [14]. The <i>AADK Friends Module</i> engages community members as strategic partners of	1) School-based prevention 2) Collaborative implementation (AADK, Ministry of Education, community) 1) Community partnership 2) Shared responsibility	1) Variable implementation fidelity. Success depends on teacher preparedness and school commitment 2) Educators may lack training and resources to deliver content effectively 3) Limited long-term evaluation (academic research) 1) Limited published evaluation of modules

	<p>AADK, providing basic exposure to prevention, early detection, and case intervention. The <i>Drug-Free Youth Module</i> targets higher education institutions, NGOs, and youth groups. Coordinated by AADK, this module covers topics such as risk and protective factors, refusal skills, values education, leadership, sports, arts, and entrepreneurship.</p>		2) Overlap with other campaigns
Volunteer Program	<p>The <i>Anti-Drug Peer Volunteers (RADA)</i> module targets adolescents and youth from schools, higher education institutions, and communities. The module aims to train youth volunteers as change agents within their communities, focusing on leadership, communication skills, awareness campaigns, and risk management.</p> <p>The <i>Early Intervention Program (PIA)</i> targets individuals who have recently become involved in drug abuse. It includes educational activities, psychosocial guidance, counselling, and community monitoring, with the objective of preventing progression toward addiction.</p>	<p>1) Youth empowerment</p> <p>2) Leadership development</p>	<p>1) Training variability</p> <p>2) Sustainability issues (volunteer turnover)</p>
	<p>The <i>Early Intervention Program (PIA)</i> targets individuals who have recently become involved in drug abuse. It includes educational activities, psychosocial guidance, counselling, and community monitoring, with the objective of preventing progression toward addiction.</p>	<p>1) Focus on Early detection and support for an individual with drug and social problems</p> <p>2) Complementary to other precautionary measures</p>	<p>1) Limited documentation and public visibility</p> <p>2) lack of peer-reviewed research examining the effectiveness of the module</p>
Treatment and Rehabilitation Program	<p><i>Cure & Care (C&C)</i> Program is designed for individuals seeking voluntary rehabilitation. Its components include medical treatment, counselling, life skills training, employment assistance, and social reintegration. The program also includes Cure & Care 1Malaysia Clinics and Community-Based Cure & Care services.</p>	<p>1) Voluntary, client-friendly; 2) Holistic rehab</p>	<p>1) Mixed relapse prevention evidence; 2) Resource constraints (staff and resources)</p>

<i>Community-Based Rehabilitation Program (PDK)</i> supports individuals who have completed treatment but continue to require assistance. This program includes group therapy sessions, community activities, mentoring support, and scheduled monitoring	1) High reported success 2) Community integration.	1) Limited independent evaluation 2) Variable effectiveness.
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Source : National Anti-Drugs Agency Malaysia [15]

3.3 Cross-Programme Synthesis

The existing drug prevention modules, both locally and internationally, typically focus on knowledge transmission, legal consequences, and health risks. While such approaches increase awareness, their long-term behavioural impact remains limited. Conceptual limitations include insufficient cultural adaptation, minimal family and community involvement, and lack of developmental sensitivity for younger children. Moreover, many modules adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, failing to account for regional, religious, and socio-cultural contexts such as those prevalent in Malaysia

Overall, the findings indicate that Malaysia's drug prevention and rehabilitation framework is comprehensive but fragmented. School-based programmes are effective for early awareness among children, while peer-led and community-based initiatives are more relevant for adolescents. However, gaps in age-specific tailoring, outcome evaluation, and contextual adaptation, limiting the overall effectiveness of existing modules. These findings directly inform the need for an integrated, age-differentiated prevention framework, which combines school, family, peer, and community interventions to address the complex realities faced by children and adolescents in high-risk regions especially bordering states such as Kelantan, Kedah, Perlis and Johor.

This review highlights the need for a prevention model that integrates theoretical foundations with contextual relevance and stakeholder participation.

3.4 Proposed Improvement Strategies: A Conceptual Framework for Enhanced Drug Prevention Awareness

In response to the identified gaps, this paper proposes a conceptual framework outlining improvement strategies for existing drug prevention awareness modules. The framework emphasizes a multi-level approach that strengthens protective factors while addressing risk factors. The proposed improvement strategy components are as follow:

- I. **Individual-Level Enhancement:** Incorporating life skills, emotional regulation, and refusal skills training.
- II. **Family-Based Strategies [8]:** Strengthening parental awareness, communication, and monitoring practices
- III. **School-Based Improvement [8]:** Integrating prevention content into curricula and fostering supportive school environments.
- IV. **Community and Cultural Integration [9] :** Leveraging religious institutions, community leaders, and culturally relevant messaging.

V. **Policy and Institutional Alignment:** Enhancing coordination among education, health, and social agencies.

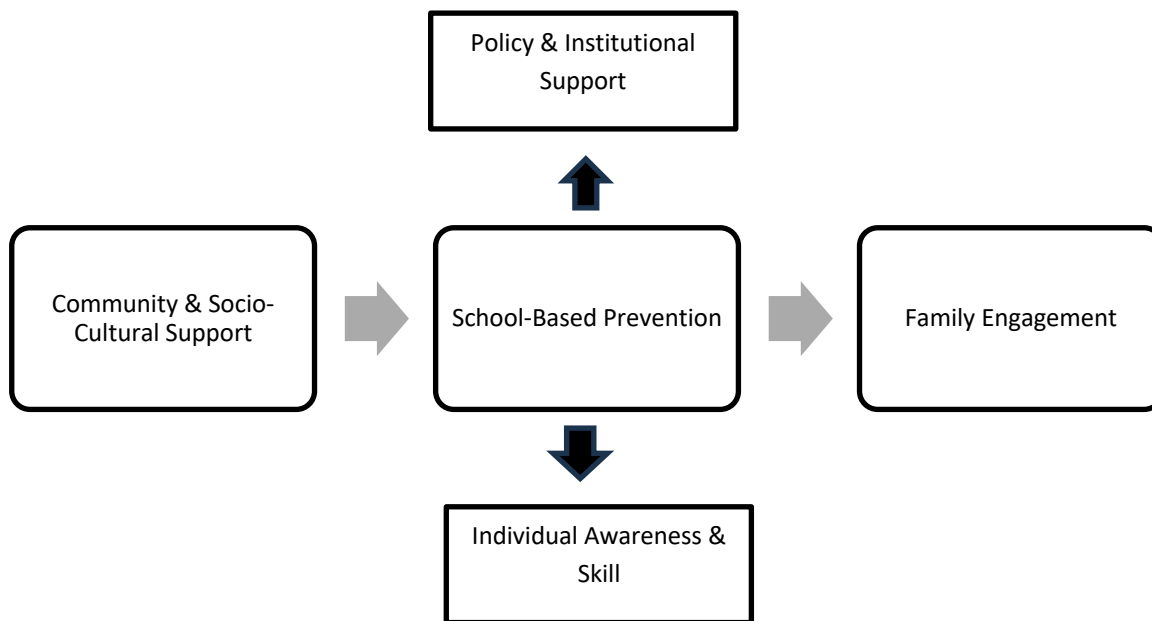


Fig. 1. Multi-level conceptual framework of drug abuse prevention awareness modules

Figure 1 illustrates the framework directly translates the exploration of drug-related issues into targeted improvement strategies, fulfilling Objective 2. Theoretically, the framework integrates behavioural and ecological perspectives into prevention awareness design. Practically, it provides guidance for improving existing modules by making them more comprehensive, culturally grounded, and developmentally appropriate. From a policy perspective, it emphasizes inter-agency collaboration and sustained preventive efforts.

4. Conclusion

This conceptual paper has explored drug-related issues among adolescents and children and proposed improvement strategies for existing drug prevention awareness modules. By aligning theoretical insights with contextual realities, the proposed framework offers a coherent foundation for enhancing prevention efforts and guiding future research and policy initiatives. This framework provides several implications such as integration of multiple behavioural and ecological theories into a unified prevention model. Practically, this study also suggested that the prevention programs should move beyond awareness campaigns toward skill-based, family-inclusive, and culturally grounded interventions. It is importance for the policymakers to ensure the coordinated efforts between education, health, religious and social welfare agencies to improve the effectiveness of the drug prevention among young people.

Future empirical studies are needed to test the effectiveness of the proposed improvement strategies. Research should focus on measuring changes in awareness, attitudes, and protective behaviours among adolescents and children in Malaysia.

Acknowledgement

This research was not funded by any grant.

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