

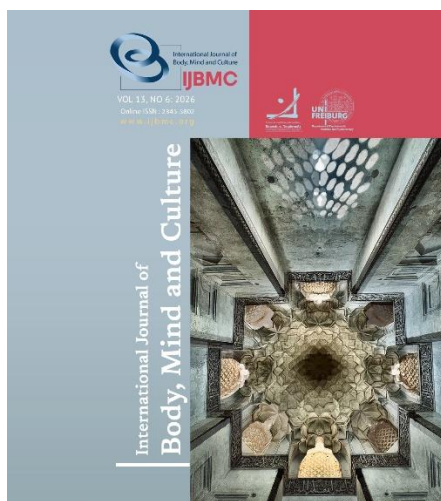
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The Predictive Role of Self-Efficacy in Intention to Avoid Drug Abuse among Iraqi Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study aims to determine the association between self-efficacy and the intention to avoid drug abuse among Iraqi secondary school students, and to assess whether higher self-efficacy independently predicts stronger avoidance intention.

Methods and Materials: A descriptive, correlational, cross-sectional study was conducted among 600 secondary school students from 12 schools in Al-Hilla City, Iraq, using a multistage sampling approach. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic information, the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale, and the 22-item Intention to Drug Avoidance Scale. Both scales were scored using a three-point Likert format. Reliability was acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.76 for the General Self-Efficacy Scale and 0.90 for the Intention to Drug Avoidance Scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Spearman's rank correlation, simple linear regression, and multiple linear regression. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Findings: Most participants were aged 15–17 years (76.0%), and more than half were female (54.3%). High self-efficacy was reported by 69.3% of students, with a mean score of 24.84 ± 3.119 . A high intention to avoid drug abuse was observed among 95.3% of students, with a mean score of 62.66 ± 6.313 . Spearman's correlation showed a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and intention to avoid drug abuse, $r = .166$, $p = .004$. Regression analysis indicated that self-efficacy significantly predicted intention to avoid drug abuse, $\beta = .137$, $B = .277$, $SE = .121$, $t = 2.288$, $p = .023$. The overall regression model was also significant, $R = .228$, $R^2 = .052$, adjusted $R^2 = .045$, $F = 8.114$, $p < .001$.

Conclusion: Self-efficacy was positively associated with and significantly predicted students' intention to avoid drug abuse. Strengthening adolescents' self-efficacy may be an important component of school-based substance abuse prevention programs.

Keywords: Self-Efficacy, Drug Abuse, Drug Avoidance Intention, Adolescents, Secondary School Students, Iraq.

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Introduction

The adolescent stage of life, which falls between childhood and adulthood, is characterized by numerous physical, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that occur between ages 10 and 19. Early adolescence (ages 10 to 13), middle adolescence (ages 14 to 16), and late adolescence/young adulthood (ages 15 to 17) and beyond are the three main developmental stages of adolescence and young adulthood, according to the scholars (Tsagem, 2022). Teenagers are more susceptible to bad habits during the transitional stage of development due to several changes. Risk factors for the development of chronic disease include certain behaviors that begin at this period, such as drug use, poor food choices, and a sedentary lifestyle (Arafa et al., 2024).

The term "drug abuse" describes the dangerous or destructive use of psychoactive substances, such as alcohol and illegal narcotics, as well as the improper use of chemicals that can change how the body's cells work (Alozie et al., 2025).

Adolescence is considered the essential age of intention to start using drugs, and young people between the ages of 18 and 25 use drugs at their highest rate. Adolescents are particularly prone to drug misuse during this time due to their high propensity for experimentation, curiosity, vulnerability to peer pressure, rebellion against authority, and low self-esteem (Nawi et al., 2021; Shariat et al., 2023).

The intention to refrain from risky activities, especially substance use, is one of the most powerful psychological constructs in influencing teenage decisions. Knowledge and action are connected by intention, which reflects both a conscious determination to abstain from drugs and an awareness of their risks (Sheeran & Webb, 2018).

The belief system that people develop through their experiences, reflecting their confidence in their capacity to carry out activities and persevere toward goals, is known as self-efficacy. To attain desired behaviors, attitudes, or objectives, people with high self-efficacy typically exert greater effort and adopt more resilient solutions (Cherewick et al., 2024; Moazami Goudarzi et al., 2025).

Adolescents who have high levels of self-efficacy are better able to withstand peer pressure, deal with

challenging circumstances without using drugs, and successfully quit or recover from substance use. High self-efficacy individuals are more likely to stop abusing drugs (Ader et al., 2024).

Methods and Materials

Study Design

The study design used in this research was a descriptive correlational cross-sectional design to assess the relationship between self-efficacy and the intention to avoid drug abuse in secondary school students. The design was appropriate for assessing associations and predictive relationships at a single point in time, while acknowledging that longitudinal or intervention designs were not feasible due to time, ethical, and practical constraints.

Participants

The study included 600 secondary school students through a multistage sampling process. In particular, the first stage involved a systematic selection of schools, and the second stage recruited students using non-probability convenience sampling. The recruitment process included all eligible and available students at the time of data collection who were invited to participate. They were also voluntary, and no refusals were recorded; hence, non-response bias was deemed to be low. The total number of secondary schools under the Al Hilla Education Directorate is 64. Of these, 12 schools were systematically selected to participate in the study. The selection process began with calculating the sampling interval (k) as the ratio of the total schools to the desired number of schools, as follows: $k=64/12=5.33$

Inclusion criteria were students enrolled in fourth or fifth grade, chosen because they are in the middle-to-late adolescent stage, a period when individuals are highly vulnerable to risk-taking behaviors, such as substance use, and when behavioral intentions are more clearly defined. Exclusion criteria were students diagnosed with cognitive or learning disabilities, and students with chronic illnesses that could affect psychological assessment.

A probable number within the interval (1 to 5) was selected as the starting point, after which schools were selected incrementally from that interval. Use a random number generator or table to select a random number

between 1 and k (inclusive). For instance, if $k = 5$, randomly select a number between 1 and 5. Suppose the random number is 3. And start from the randomly chosen number (3) and select schools.

Instruments

A study questionnaire was designed for the objectives of the current study. It involved 3 parts: Demographical data, General self-efficacy scale (GSES), which consists of 10 items, and Intention to Drug Avoidance Scale (IDAS), which consists of 22 items, based on a three-point Likert scale: (1 = True, 2 = Sometimes True, 3 = Not True). To ensure that higher total scores indicate a stronger intention to avoid drug abuse, the items were coded as follows during data analysis. The range of scores is 22 to 66, where high scores would translate to high intention to avoid drug abuse. A sample item has also been included to enhance clarity and reproducibility, and the instrument is divided into 2 factors: desire and commitment to avoid drugs (15 items) and readiness to avoid drugs (7 items). The instruments were translated into Iraqi Arabic using a forward-backward translation technique. A panel of experts in community health nursing and psychology reviewed the translated version to ensure it was culturally relevant and clear. A pilot test with 60 students did not require significant adjustments.

Reliability of the Instrument

The internal consistency method was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire in the current study; it measures the consistency among the instrument's items. The internal consistency between items was determined by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha was 0.76 for the General Self-Efficacy Scale and 0.90 for the Intention to Drug Avoidance Scale.

Procedure

Structured interviews and a questionnaire were used to collect the data. When the study tool was distributed, the researcher was on hand to explain the study's primary goal to the participants and to facilitate their proper responses.

Data Analysis

The data were evaluated using the appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics. The frequencies and percentages were used to present the sociodemographic characteristics. Mean and standard deviation were used to describe the continuous variables. The correlation between self-efficacy and intention to avoid drug abuse was analyzed by using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient since the responses in the scale were ordinal in nature. The simple linear regression test was used to determine whether self-efficacy is a significant predictor of intention to avoid drug abuse. A multiple linear regression analysis was also conducted to assess the overall predictive value of self-efficacy.

The equal-interval method was applied to classify scores on both scales into three levels (low, moderate, and high). All potential score ranges for each scale were subdivided into three equal groups to provide a standardized classification. For the General Self-Efficacy Scale (range: 10-30), levels were classified as low (10-16.66), moderate (16.67-23.33), and high (23.34-30). In the Intention to Drug Avoidance Scale (range 22-66), the definition levels were low (22-36.66), moderate (36.67-51.33), and high (51.34-66). A p-value of 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Findings and Results

Table 1 shows that (76%) of students were between 15 and 17 years old, more than half of the sample were female, and a greater proportion were in the fifth grade (58.3%).

Table 1

Socio-Demographic characteristics of secondary school students

List	Variables		F	%
1	Age (Years)	15 - 17	456	76
		18 - 20	144	24
		Total	600	100
2	Sex	Male	274	45.7
		Female	326	54.3
		Total	600	100
3	Education grade	Fourth	250	41.7
		Fifth	350	58.3
		Total	600	100

Table 2*Distribution of secondary school students according to their parents' socio-demographic variables (SDVs)*

List	Variables		F	%
1	Father's education	Unable to read & write	16	2.7
		Read & write	124	20.7
		Primary school	162	27
		Secondary school	164	27.3
		Diploma/Bachelor's and above	134	22.3
	Total	600	100	
2	Mother's education	Doesn't read & write	50	8.3
		Read & write	204	34
		Primary school	136	22.7
		Secondary school	106	17.7
		Diploma/Bachelor's and above	104	17.3
	Total	600	100	
3	Parental marital status	Living together	520	86.7
		Separated	14	2.3
		Divorced	32	5.3
		Deceased father or mother	34	5.7
		Total	600	100

Table 2 shows the sociodemographic background of the students' parents, specifically fathers' education; the majority of fathers have either a primary (27%) or a secondary school education (27.3%). While the largest

segment (34%) of mothers can read and write without formal education. Regarding parental marital status, a significant majority of students (86.7%) come from families in which both parents live together.

Table 3*Overall Assessment of Self-efficacy among Secondary School Students*

Self-efficacy	f	%	M	SD	Ass.
Low	4	0.7	24.84	3.119	High
Moderate	180	30			
High	416	69.3			
Total	600	100			

Table 3 indicates that the largest proportion of students (69.3%) reported high self-efficacy, 30% reported a moderate level, and only 0.7% reported low self-efficacy. The mean score (M = 24.84) and standard

deviation (SD = 3.119) indicate a generally positive self-perception among students regarding avoidance of drug abuse.

Table 4*Overall Assessment of Intention to Avoid Drug Abuse among Secondary School Students*

Intention to Avoid Drug Abuse	f	%	M	SD	Ass.
Low	10	1.7	62.66	6.313	High intention
Moderate	18	3			
High	572	95.3			
Total	600	100			

Table 4 exhibits that the majority of students (95.3%) reported high intention to avoid drug abuse,

3% demonstrated a moderate level, and only 1.7% demonstrated a low intention level.

Table 5*Correlation among Self-efficacy, and Intention to Avoid Drug Abuse among Secondary Schools Students (N=600)*

Spearman's rho		SE	InADA
Self-efficacy (SE)	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.166**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.004
Intention to Avoid Drug Abuse (InADA)	Correlation Coefficient	.166**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.

Table 5 indicates that self-efficacy has a significant positive correlation with the intention to avoid drug abuse among secondary school students.

Table 6*Predictive Association of Self-efficacy on Intention to Avoid Drug Abuse among Secondary Schools Students (N=600)*

Independent variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Self-efficacy	.277	.121	.137	2.288	.023

Table 6 shows that self-efficacy ($\beta = .137$, $p = .023$) significantly predicts students' intention to avoid drug abuse.

Table 7*Multiple Linear Regression for Impact of Self-efficacy on Intention to Avoid Drug Abuse among Secondary Schools Students (N=600)*

Model Summary				
R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p-value
.228 ^a	.052	.045	8.114	.001

Table 7 shows that the model yielded a statistically significant result ($F = 8.114$, $p < .001$), indicating that the predictors collectively contribute to the variance in students' intention to avoid drug abuse.

Discussion and Conclusion

The demographic data for the study participants indicated that the majority (76%) were aged 15-17 years. This finding is consistent with a study that reported that 80% of participants were between 16 and 17 years (Karaca & Emre, 2025), reflecting the typical age range of secondary school students (14–18 years).

More than half of the respondents were females (54.3%), aligning with the study conducted among Jordanian high-school students, where (52.2%) were female (Raffee et al., 2021).

Regarding education level, most students were from the fifth grade (58.3%), a pattern that contrasts with another study, which found the largest proportion (29.6%) of participants in grade ten (Melkam et al., 2023).

Regarding parental education, the majority of fathers had completed secondary school (27.3%), which contrasts with the findings of Mohammed et al. (2021), who reported that the largest proportion of fathers, one third (31.5%), had higher education.

While mothers' education levels show that one-third of mothers (34%) can read and write without formal education. This result contradicts a study conducted in Southwest Nigeria, which found that more than half of mothers (59.3%) had a secondary school education (Idowu et al., 2023).

A large proportion of students (86.7%) reported that both parents were living together, a result consistent

with the study of Idowu et al. (2018), which showed that 69.1% of adolescents lived with both parents.

According to the researchers, the study's demographic distribution is representative of a typical secondary school teenage population. The generally good behavioral patterns found in this study may have been influenced by the preponderance of younger kids and those from intact households.

According to the study's findings, 63.3% of participants had high levels of self-efficacy. Students indicated confidence in their ability to work hard to solve problems, handle unforeseen circumstances, maintain composure under pressure, and devise solutions in challenging situations. The findings demonstrate that students typically view themselves as competent, resilient, and resourceful, all of which are important markers of strong self-efficacy. This result agrees with the findings of Prawita & Hariko (2024), in which the majority of students (92%) demonstrated high self-efficacy. While Hossaini et al. (2022) are inconsistent with this study's findings, indicating that 63.2% of students had low self-efficacy.

According to the study's findings, the majority of students (95.3%) had a high degree of intention to avoid drugs. This finding is in alignment with the results of the study conducted by Latt et al, which utilized a predictive correlational design and found that the majority of adolescents demonstrated a high intention to avoid drug abuse (Latt et al., 2024). Furthermore, this study aligns with Al-Zalabani et al. (2015), who reported that a high percentage (71.7%) of intermediate and secondary students intended to quit smoking. The consistency in findings may be attributed to a shared awareness among adolescents in studies about the risks of drug abuse.

The current study found that self-efficacy is significantly and positively related to adolescents' intention to avoid drug abuse. These results reinforce the notion that self-efficacy is a key psychological resource in the prevention of substance-use intentions among adolescents. The results of the present study are in line with a study conducted among secondary school students in Ilorin West, Nigeria, which found a statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.34$, $p < 0.05$) between self-efficacy and substance abuse (Sholagberu, 2024). Likewise, a Turkish study found that greater self-efficacy in preventing substance use was associated with lower levels of cigarette, alcohol, and other drug use

among youth (Karatay & Baş, 2019). At the same time, other research indicates that self-efficacy for protection against substance use can be negatively affected by psychosocial factors such as loneliness (Kayaoglu & Özer, 2024).

Conclusion

The study concluded that the majority of students demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy and a high level of intention to avoid drug abuse. The significant positive association between the two variables confirms that self-efficacy is not only prevalent but also an important independent predictor of adolescents' avoidance intention. These results highlight the crucial role of psychological strength and personal confidence in shaping protective behaviors among youth.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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