

International Conference on Public Policy & Social Sciences 2023

13-15 September 2023

Organised by Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Seremban Campus, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, and International University of Sarajevo (IUS), Bosnia and Herzegovina

Qualitative Assessment on the Impact of Family-Based Drug Prevention Program by the National Anti-Drugs Agency in Malaysia

Siti Salina Abdullah¹, Abdul Rahman Abdul Latip^{1,2*}, Nor Hayati Sa'at¹, Suzaili Wahab³

* Corresponding Author

¹ Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia

² Institute of Oceanography and Environment (INOS), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia

³ Psychiatry Department, Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz UKM, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ctsalina@umt.edu.my, rahmanlatip@umt.edu.my, norhayati@umt.edu.my, suzaili@ppukm.ukm.edu.my
Tel: +60134556578

Abstract

Family-based prevention programs aim to prevent youth from falling victim to substance abuse issues by focusing on what families can offer. This study attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of the Family on Alert (FoA) program conducted by the National Anti-Drugs Agency (NADA). A qualitative method was utilized involving focus group discussions with key informants from NADA in the state of Selangor, Kedah, Johor, Sabah, and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Generally, the FoA program implemented by NADA has positively impacted the participants, particularly in increasing the awareness, knowledge, and attitude among parents in preventing drug abuse among adolescents in Malaysia.

Keywords: Prevention Program, Family on Alert, Impact, National Anti-Drugs Agency

eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2024. The Authors. Published for AMER and cE-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers), and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies), College of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v9iSI22.5849>

1.0 Introduction

The increased social problems among the youth have become a public concern. Substance abuse, which includes acts such as smoking cigarettes, vaping, drinking alcoholic beverages, and taking drugs, are popular symptoms among today's youth. Drug abuse has been proven to destroy individual lives and bring misery to the entire family, society, and country. This destruction takes place in a planned form by those who want to profit solely from the drug trade by making youth and teenagers the target group. Most of those addicted to drugs start early in this unhealthy activity, and it is difficult for them to stop the addiction (Mohamed, 2022).

According to statistics released by the National Anti-Drug Agency (2021), there were 128,325 individuals involved in drug abuse and addiction. Most (65 percent) were young people aged between 19 and 39. Meanwhile, 95.5 percent of them were men. The Malay race was dominant, with 76.9 percent involved in this social problem. On the other hand, 29.4 percent of all individuals involved were unemployed and contributed to various criminal cases such as theft, injuring people, housebreaking, rape, and robbery. In this regard, trends and statistics of crimes involving children and teenagers are seen as worrying (Ahmad, 2020).

eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2024. The Authors. Published for AMER and cE-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers), and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies), College of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v9iSI22.5849221>

In light of this, family issues emerged as the predominant determinant concerning drug abuse among adolescents. According to the time-dependent models, a high degree of parental supervision, a high degree of family support, and a low degree of family conflict can protect children and adolescents from drug use, whereas a sustained low degree of parental supervision and a high degree of family conflict may promote students' experimental drug use (Chiang et al., 2022). In their studies, Li Liu et al. (2022) indicated that parenting styles significantly predict adolescent drug abuse identification, where different parenting styles have different influencing mechanisms, further indicating that poor parenting styles are a risk factor for adolescent drug abuse. Additionally, disturbed family structure has been revealed to be associated with an increased risk of substance use among youth (Shah et al., 2022).

Family-based drug prevention program is designed to reduce problems among youth and encourage positive development at the family level. As described in a study by Čablová et al. (2013), there is proof of a connection between parenting styles and involvement of substance use among children and adolescents. The findings should reflect in drug prevention strategies, particularly family-based prevention programs. In addition, another study suggested the need for further research into familial interrelations and the structure of the families addicts were born into, as well as the need to implement family-based approaches to drug addiction prevention and therapy (Zimić & Jukić, 2012).

In Malaysia, the responsibility of drug prevention lies under the National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA). Various prevention programs have been implemented to increase public awareness and educate the community to avoid drugs. The focus of prevention education and public awareness campaigns is carried out through programs in the form of omnipresence, outreach, community empowerment, guidance and counseling of families, school students and students of learning or skills centers and the public, as well as the Drug-Free Workplace Program conducted in the private sector and public throughout the country. High-risk areas have also been identified throughout the country, while efforts are being made to free these areas from the threat of drug addiction. The Ministry of Home Affairs has set a target for 155 High-Risk Areas nationwide to be restored by 2025.

The Family on Alert (FoA) program is a family-based drug prevention program developed by NADA, targeting families at risk so that they can deal with drug problems more effectively (NADA, 2022). The target group of this program are families living in risky areas (high crime rate, social problems, high number of drug addicts), divorced families, family members who are drug addicts, single mothers or fathers and family cases section 15 (1) of the Dangerous Drugs Act (DDA) 1952. The objective of this program is to provide participants with awareness and knowledge about the effects of drugs on their health. Its second objective aims to expose participants to knowledge, skills and guidance on parenting styles, financial management and stress management. This program focuses on at-risk families so they can deal with drug problems more effectively. Furthermore, the implementation of this program is hoped to increase protective factors and reduce risk factors in helping parents deal with drug abuse issues.

Every year, the government has allocated large funds to eradicate drug addiction symptoms through the National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA). In 2020, NADA's spending allocation increased by 15 percent compared to the previous year, and a total of 173 posts have also been approved to be filled by the Public Service Department to empower NADA's functions (Parliament, 2019). However, to what extent is NADA effective in family-based drug prevention? Why are the youth, whether in the urban or rural areas, still involved in this social issue even though various campaigns and awareness programs have been conducted? So, a study is needed to see the effectiveness of the family-based drug prevention program implemented by the National Anti-Drug Agency in Malaysia.

2.0 Literature Review

Adolescence is the period that will determine behaviors and conditions that can lead to adulthood disorders among teenagers. Substance use, such as smoking, drinking, and drug abuse, often begin during this time, resulting in a major social, physical, and mental health impact on individuals, families, and societies. Later, it becomes crucial public health challenges; poor health, suicide, accidents, mental illness, and decline in life expectancy. According to Das et al. (2016), initiatives should be taken on early detection, awareness and prevention programs, as well as frequent monitoring of adolescent activities. A successful intervention program must become a platform to enhance self-confidence, social skills, and problem-solving skills, both for the adolescent and parents.

Generally, a family-based drug prevention program is an intervention that seeks to prevent substance misuse and drug addiction within the family unit context. These programs normally involve educating and supporting families to strengthen family relationships, improve parenting skills, encourage effective communication, and diminish risk factors related to substance use among family members, mainly children and adolescents. The main idea behind this program is that the family plays a vital role in guiding and shaping the behavior of its members, including choices related to substance misuse. The family-based approach is an effort to foster necessary resources and skills related to drug abuse behaviors (Robertson et al., 2021).

Assessment on the impact of public policies has become a great concern and has been practiced by many countries worldwide. If the impact assessments do not exist, it becomes difficult for the government to make any evidence-based decisions in the absence of the needed information (Latip & Othman, 2021). The effectiveness of current government intervention, particularly in drug prevention programs, will determine how far the program has achieved its objectives and goals. A study by Baharudin, Hussin, Sumari, Mohamed, Zakaria, and Sawai (2014) explored the impact of family drug intervention program at a drug treatment and rehabilitation agency in Malaysia. The findings support that the family intervention program has a positive potential to support family members in the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addiction.

On top of that, Adnan, Arshat, and Shahril (2022) explored the relationship between family impact, coping and mental well-being among wives of drug addicts in Malaysia. The study found a direct association between family impact and coping, as well as between coping and mental well-being. It was later concluded that this kind of family-based drug prevention program benefited drug addict wives

and consultants related to this field in terms of enhancing coping mechanisms in managing family impact and improving mental well-being, specifically amongst low-income drug addict wives.

Additionally, Van Ryzin et al. (2016) evaluated the effectiveness of family-based prevention programs on youth involved in substance abuse. The program's components, such as parental monitoring or behavior management, positive family relationship, and problem-solving, contributed to an effective family-based prevention program. The element of youth-focused may be able to improve program efficacy. Another study concluded that the effects of family-based prevention programs for substance abuse among youth are small, but the impacts are consistent and persistent for the longer term. The systematic review studies analyzed the success of universal family-based prevention programs and reporting outcomes of substance use among school-aged up to 18 years old (Foxcroft & Tsertsvadze, 2011).

3.0 Methodology

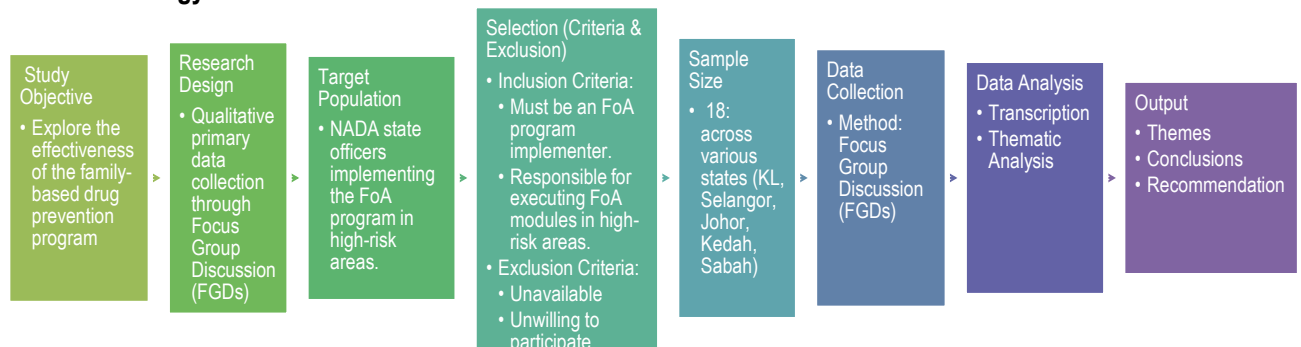


Fig. 1: Flowchart of the Study

This study combined primary and secondary data to explore the effectiveness of the family-based drug prevention program implemented by National Anti-Drug Agency in Malaysia. For the primary data, a qualitative method was used employing Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with 18 informants from NADA's state officers of Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory, Selangor, Johor, Kedah, and Sabah. These states were chosen due to the highest rate of drug addiction cases and hot spots areas identified by NADA.

Purposive sampling was used in this study for selecting the population. The informants comprised one informant from NADA officers in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, 10 informants from NADA Kedah, three from NADA Selangor, two from NADA Johor, and the remaining two from NADA Sabah. The chosen sample units possessed the features or characteristics needed by the researcher, which enabled a detailed understanding and exploration of the impact of the Family on Alert program. Among inclusion criteria needed were the informants must be implementers of the Family on Alert (FoA) program and are responsible for executing the FoA module in the high-risk areas of the selected states. The informants that unavailable for interviews or unwilling to participate were excluded.

The discussions were interpreted and transcribed. Each FGD session took between one hour to one and 45 minutes; the researcher recorded all the conversations. Among the questions asked to determine the impact of the FoA program were the target/goal for the program, the activities involved in the family-based drug prevention program, was the program successfully implemented as planned, whether any problems/issues arose, and whether or not there are any desired changes to program participants. Thematic analysis was used to organize the data systematically by coding and coordinating the data into themes. In the coding process, the researcher did not only focus on the transcribed data but also included the secondary data from NADA annual report, books, articles, and field notes taken during the data collection.

4.0 Findings

Generally, the impacts of the family-based drug prevention program implemented by NADA can be found in the Family on Alert program. In Johor, after implementing FoA, a feedback form will be distributed to the program participants to be filled out. According to the result, the participants' knowledge after joining the program was seen to increase. The participants were provided with knowledge about drugs and how to address the issue of drug abuse if it were to arise within their families. Other than that, a response from the community representative stated that the parents who attended the program with their children experienced positive changes, particularly in parenting styles, knowledge and communication skills with their children. This program has helped them in improving their relationship with their family.

...According to the module, we do need to carry out a questionnaire after the program to be filled out by the participants and among the questions are about their knowledge, whether increasing or decreasing. On average, they said that their knowledge about drugs increased. For example, we do a program with the community, and after the program, we are still in contact with the community representative. I give an example of when we did a pilot program at PPR Melanoi; the PPR representative told us that the parents who came to our program experienced positive changes, such as in parenting style, knowledge and communication skills with children... (Informant No.2, Johor)

In ensuring the effective implementation of FoA, NADA has invited strategic partners from other agencies, such as the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like the Drug Prevention Association of Malaysia (PEMADAM) in together delivering the knowledge to the participants. According to State Drugs Policy, the strategic partners of NADA consist of nine ministries and 15 agencies in the efforts to tackle the issue of drug abuse in Malaysia. They know which agencies they should collaborate with before implementing a program. They must also put other interactive activities, such as coloring contests, to attract more participants. They will do a need assessment before the program take place. They need to be informed of the interests of the local community, such as sports, to ensure local community support while simultaneously achieving the target number of participants.

We invite various departments, for example, LPPKN and PEMADAM, in terms of providing knowledge to the participants. Besides, to attract participants, we have to do other activities like coloring contests. We have to see what are the interests of the local community. For example, there is a community where they love futsal or sports activities. We cannot stick to one activity. That is why before the implementation of each program, we have to first assess our crowd and what their needs are... (Informant No 1, Johor)

In the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, implementing a family-based drug prevention program has brought positive changes to parents and children. Collaboration with PEMADAM has helped them not only in the FoA program but other impactful communities and family programs to hinder them from any drug misuse. They also used various approaches to reach the target audience, such as implementing it as a weekly program. The involvement of local communities and NGOs is vital to create awareness and a sense of belonging.

...as for NGOs, we have PEMADAM to help us implement the FoA, especially community and family programs... how to prevent people from getting stuck with drugs. For example, we have done a program with PEMADAM...for the FoA program..we have done an aerobics program. Some people bring their families. Sitting at Tasik Permaisuri, we do a program and make it a weekly practice there. So the one running up the program is PEMADAM... if it is me, personally one day I want to give prevention and public awareness matters to NGOs, not necessarily the implementing agency, because the community must be responsible to the community (Informant No. 7, Kuala Lumpur)

In terms of achievement, at the early stage, they just focused on talks and exhibitions in general. That is why they cannot reach the right participants. Then, they changed the implementation methods of FoA by directly approaching the targeted families. They have the list of risk families and target this group to attend the program. Overall, the achievement of this program was acceptable, not at the level of 100 percent, but they can see the changes in the behavior of the parents, particularly in providing help first before punishing their children.

...in terms of achievements, for the initial stage, we used to only do talks, the exhibition was more for the committee members... for example, we held a discussion with the members of the residents' association...so the target group was not reached... so we changed it to go direct...we have a list of OKP families from the rehabilitation unit... then, we have a list of names of students at risk because we do urine tests at school... ...and when it is like this, we can see the changes among the participants even if it is not 100%, but when there is a problem, parents do not strictly punish but give help to family members first... (Informant No. 7, Kuala Lumpur)

5.0 Discussion

The findings of this study indicated that the implementation of the FoA program in Malaysia brought positive impacts in increasing knowledge of parenting styles and communication skills among family members. This is consistent with Sumari et al.'s (2022) study, which found that family-based drug prevention programs were effective in improving parents' awareness, family roles, and communication skills among family members. On top of that, the result of this study found active collaboration and partnership between NADA and various agencies and NGOs in Malaysia to ensure effective implementation of the FoA program. This finding aligns with the recommendation of the study from Jamir Singh et al. (2021), which found that strategic partnerships between government and non-government agencies will help to increase the effectiveness of the family drug prevention program. In addition, the findings of this study found that the methods of implementation also have been changed to ensure they reach the targeted families. This is in line with the findings from Van Ryzin et al. (2016), who found that the element of youth focus may be able to improve the effectiveness of the program.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings from this study demonstrated that the impacts of the family-based drug prevention program implemented by the National Anti-Drugs Agency in Malaysia have positively impacted the participants. In a nutshell, this program has improved family members' awareness, knowledge, and attitudes in preventing drug abuse in Malaysia. However, this study only focused on the implementer of the FoA program without involving participants of the program. As recommendation, future implementation of the FoA program should also tailor the modules based on the specific needs of different communities. Factors such as cultural background, family structure, and socioeconomic status should be considered to improve the effectiveness of the program. The findings from this study could give valuable

input for the NADA in empowering their strategies and strengthening their Family on Alert module in achieving the vision of becoming a free drug country in the future.

Acknowledgment

This research was supported by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia through Long Term Research Grant Scheme (LRGS/1/2019/UKM/02/2/5). The authors also wish to acknowledge the dedication and hard work demonstrated by all the members of the research team involved in this project.

References

- Ahmad, O. (2020). Jenayah pelajar sekolah membimbangkan bharian.com.my. Retrieved 3 August 2022, from <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/wilayah/2020/12/760676/jenayah-pelajar-sekolah-membimbangkan>.
- Adnan, H. A., Arshat, Z., & Ahmad Shahril, N. S. (2022). A cross-sectional study of Malaysian low-income drug addict wives: Relationship between Family Impact, coping and mental wellbeing. *F1000Research*, 11, 683. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.122476.1>
- Baharudin, D. F., Mohd Hussin, A. H., Sumari, M., Mohamed, S., Zakaria, M. Z., & Sawai, R. P. (2013). Family intervention for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addiction: An exploratory study. *Journal of Substance Use*, 19(4), 301–306. <https://doi.org/10.3109/14659891.2013.799239>
- Čablová, L., Pazderková, K., & Miovský, M. (2013). Parenting styles and alcohol use among children and adolescents: A systematic review. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 21(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09687637.2013.817536>
- Chiang, Y. C., Li, X., Lee, C.-Y., Wu, C.-C., Chang, H.-Y., & Zhang, S. (2022). Effects of social attachment on experimental drug use from childhood to adolescence: An 11-year prospective Cohort Study. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.818894>
- Das, J. K., Salam, R. A., Arshad, A., Finkelstein, Y., & Bhutta, Z. A. (2016). Interventions for adolescent substance abuse: An overview of Systematic Reviews. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 59(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.06.021>
- Foxcroft, D. R., & Tsertsvadze, A. (2011). Universal family-based prevention programs for alcohol misuse in young people. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.cd009308>
- Jamir Singh, P. S., Azman, A., & Drani, S. (2021). The menace of drug addiction in The family: Challenges, coping strategies and recommendations. *Asian Social Work Journal*, 6(6), 23–26. <https://doi.org/10.47405/aswj.v6i6.193>
- Latip, A. R. A., & Othman, N. (2021). A socio-economic transformation of the ECER-development programmes in enhancing the well-being of the people. *Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 17(3). <https://doi.org/10.17576/geo-2021-1703-12>
- Liu, L., Meng, W., & Liu, B. (2022). The mediating role of social support in the relationship between parenting styles and adolescent drug abuse identification. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.802408>
- Robertson, M. N., Downey, L. H., Seitz, H. H., Hardman, A. M., & Buys, D. R. (2021). Rural adults' perceived role of family members in Prescription Opioid Misuse Prevention: Implications for family-based approaches. *The Journal of Rural Health*, 38(1), 100–111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jrh.12565>
- Shah, J., Shah, A., El-Sakka, A., Kandil, O., Shehata, M., & Shoib, S. (2022). Family structure and substance use in 6,178 American Indian youth: a cross-sectional study. *European review for medical and pharmacological sciences*, 26, 4979–4982. https://doi.org/10.26355/eurrev_202207_29283
- Sumari, M., Baharudin, D. F., Yahya, F., & Abu Shahim, M. R. (2022). Family intervention in the treatment of female juvenile delinquency: A qualitative study in the Collectivist Society of Malaysia. *The Family Journal*, 106648072211328. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807221132806>
- Van Ryzin, M. J., Roseth, C. J., Fosco, G. M., Lee, Y., & Chen, I.-C. (2016). A component-centered meta-analysis of family-based prevention programs for adolescent substance use. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 45, 72–80. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2016.03.007>
- Zimić, J. I., & Jukić, V. (2012). Familial risk factors favoring drug addiction onset. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 44(2), 173–185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2012.685408>