



Managing Youth Risk Behavior Through Parental Involvement and Character Education: Implications for Human Capital Development in Emerging Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how parental involvement and character education operate as strategic instruments of Human Resource Development (HRD) in preventing adolescent drug abuse. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach, data were collected from 15 adolescents and their parents in Palopo, Indonesia. Thematic analysis revealed that peer influence, emotional neglect, and the absence of structured value education were key factors contributing to youth vulnerability. In contrast, families practicing consistent value transmission, emotional support, and dialogic parenting enhanced adolescent behavioral resilience. The findings position the family as a foundational site of early-stage HRD, where emotional intelligence, moral reasoning, and decision-making competencies are developed. The study offers practical implications for HRD policy and practice, emphasizing the integration of family-based interventions and value-oriented parenting in national strategies to strengthen youth behavior and human capital in emerging communities.

Keywords: Adolescent Drug Abuse; Character Education; Human Capital Development; Family Governance; Parental Involvement.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescent drug abuse has become a persistent and alarming issue, particularly in developing countries where socio-economic instability, limited access to education, and fragile family systems intersect to shape youth behavior (Dykes & Casker, 2021; Ignaszewski, 2021). In Indonesia, the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) reported a steady increase in drug abuse cases among youth, with the highest prevalence found among individuals aged 15 to 35 years. This phenomenon not only jeopardizes public health and social stability but also threatens the long-term progress of human capital development. Youths entangled in drug use often face deteriorating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functions, which impairs their educational performance, career potential, and overall contribution to national productivity. Understanding the underlying factors and effective preventive mechanisms of adolescent drug abuse has therefore become a crucial concern across multiple academic and professional domains.

Among the most influential micro-environments affecting adolescent development is the family unit. A growing body of literature underscores the central role of parental involvement in shaping children's moral, emotional, and behavioral competencies. Positive parenting—characterized by open communication, emotional availability, and value transmission—has been consistently associated with lower rates of adolescent risk behaviors, including substance abuse (Martínez et al., 2021; Yamaoka et al., 2021). Conversely, dysfunctional family settings marked by conflict, neglect, or lack of supervision often correlate with increased vulnerability to drug experimentation. From a human resource development (HRD) perspective, the family functions not merely as a social entity, but as a foundational platform for early-stage capacity building. This view positions the family as a strategic actor in cultivating resilience, autonomy, and ethical behavior in future members of the workforce (Goff et al., 2023; Paoloni & Modaffari, 2022).

Closely linked to familial influence is the concept of character education, which is increasingly being recognized as a core strategy in preventive behavioral interventions (Kirkbride et al., 2024; Martínez et al., 2021). Character education, especially when rooted in home-based practices and reinforced through school curricula, instills key values such as empathy, self-regulation, responsibility, and integrity. These attributes are vital for enabling adolescents to navigate peer pressure, emotional distress, and moral dilemmas (Sanjani, 2024). Research has shown that character strength not only deters risky behavior but also enhances academic achievement, civic engagement, and life satisfaction. As such, character education—when embedded in daily parenting and community culture—becomes a transformative tool for individual and collective development.

However, despite the growing literature on youth drug abuse and family dynamics, a critical research gap remains in exploring how parental involvement and character

education jointly operate as strategic tools within the broader framework of human capital development—especially in emerging Southeast Asian societies (Froiland, 2020). Most existing studies treat family and education as socio-cultural determinants, often detached from the managerial and policy-oriented perspectives that could better inform sustainable interventions. Furthermore, very few empirical studies contextualize this problem within mid-sized urban areas like Palopo, where adolescents are increasingly exposed to drugs through digital platforms, shifting cultural norms, and limited civic education. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the integration of family-based values and parenting strategies as a viable human resource strategy for preventing youth risk behavior in under-researched localities (Li et al., 2024; Tinner et al., 2022).

This research aims to investigate how parental involvement and character education function as preventive strategies against adolescent drug abuse, and how these practices contribute to human capital development at the community level (Baig et al., 2021). Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, this study draws on the lived experiences of adolescents and their parents in Palopo City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The research emphasizes the importance of early interventions and the role of family as a strategic unit of behavioral governance. It also highlights the multifaceted impact of parent-adolescent relationships on shaping personal choices and resisting peer pressure associated with drug use.

The findings are expected to offer both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of HRD and behavioral management, particularly in relation to youth risk prevention. On a practical level, the study offers insights for community stakeholders, school administrators, social workers, and law enforcement professionals—particularly those, like the researcher, who are directly involved in public security and social intervention (Talwar et al., 2023; Valk & Kratoviš, 2021). By framing the problem of adolescent drug use through a managerial and developmental lens, this study aims to bridge the gap between family systems and strategic human capital planning in emerging communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Adolescent Drug Abuse and Risk Behavior: A Conceptual Framing

Adolescent drug abuse is a multifaceted public health and social issue that has long-lasting consequences on individual development and societal stability. During adolescence, individuals undergo rapid biological, psychological, and social changes, making them highly susceptible to risk-taking behavior, including substance abuse (Asgari et al., 2021; Pifer et al., 2024; Volkow & Blanco, 2023). Studies have shown that this period is marked by increased sensitivity to peer influence, identity formation, and experimentation—factors that often intersect with contextual stressors such as family dysfunction, poor emotional regulation, and limited access to healthy coping strategies (Branje et al., 2021; Sisk & Gee, 2022).

The use of narcotics, stimulants, and other illicit substances by adolescents is not merely a health issue but also a developmental barrier that impedes educational performance, self-efficacy, and future employability. It is therefore critical to examine the socio-environmental conditions that precede and sustain such behavior (Martínez et al., 2021). Risk behavior theory (Jessor & Jessor, 1977) and the social development model (Danial et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2022) emphasize the interplay between individual

vulnerabilities and environmental influences—including family, peers, and media—as key determinants of adolescent deviance. These frameworks support a holistic view of youth behavior that requires multi-level intervention strategies.

2. Parental Involvement and Family Dynamics in Behavioral Development

Family is widely recognized as the primary agent of socialization and moral development during childhood and adolescence (Dickinson et al., 2023). Parental involvement, defined as the active engagement of parents in their children’s academic, emotional, and social lives, has been consistently associated with lower incidence of drug use among adolescents (Dermawan, 2025; Zolopa et al., 2022). Supportive parenting practices—such as monitoring, open dialogue, emotional support, and consistent discipline—are protective factors that promote resilience and reduce behavioral risks (Sanjani, 2024).

In contrast, dysfunctional family dynamics, including neglect, conflict, and emotional distance, are significant risk factors for youth engagement in drug-related behavior (Saladino et al., 2021). Frohlich and Collins (2023) found that adolescents from disjointed families were significantly more likely to resort to substance abuse as a coping mechanism for emotional distress. The presence or absence of parental figures—especially fathers—also plays a critical role in influencing behavioral outcomes. The father’s involvement has been linked to stronger identity formation, emotional security, and moral discipline.

In the Indonesian context, traditional family norms often assign caregiving primarily to mothers, while fathers are seen as disciplinary or economic figures. This cultural construct may reduce opportunities for balanced parenting and emotional bonding, particularly in at-risk communities. Hence, increasing parental involvement—especially by fathers—can serve as a key strategy in reducing adolescent exposure to risky environments.

3. Character Education and Moral Formation: An HRD Perspective

Character education refers to the intentional process of nurturing ethical, emotional, and social competencies in children and adolescents. These competencies include honesty, responsibility, empathy, respect, and self-regulation—all of which are crucial for resisting peer pressure and making informed decisions (Vettriselman, 2025). Within the framework of Human Resource Development (HRD), character education serves as a strategic investment in the early-stage formation of future human capital (Branje et al., 2021; Dabić et al., 2023).

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the need to embed character education not only within formal school systems but also in family settings (Banwo et al., 2022; Branje et al., 2021). A longitudinal study by Purba Harahap et al. (2024) revealed that adolescents who received integrated character education at home and school demonstrated significantly lower propensities toward substance abuse and other deviant behavior. Character education is most effective when practiced consistently and supported by meaningful adult relationships—particularly those within the family.

Moreover, the HRD literature increasingly emphasizes the need to develop not only cognitive skills but also socio-emotional and ethical competencies. These “soft assets” are vital for enhancing employability, social adaptability, and long-term productivity. Therefore, investing in character education is no longer merely a moral imperative but a

strategic component of national development planning—especially in contexts where the youth represent a demographic majority.

4. Integration of Family-Based Interventions in Human Capital Strategy

The intersection of family-based interventions and human capital development is a growing area of interest, especially in the context of sustainable development and social innovation. While conventional HRD strategies often focus on formal education and workplace training, scholars have argued for a more holistic approach that includes early-stage development through family institutions (Banwo et al., 2022). Families that actively cultivate self-regulation, emotional intelligence, and moral reasoning contribute directly to the quality of human capital emerging from communities.

Yet, policy implementation in many emerging regions remains fragmented. Family interventions are typically framed as moral or religious efforts, not as developmental strategies with measurable HRD outcomes. This framing limits the scope and scalability of family-based programs, reducing their visibility within national education and health agendas. The integration of parenting, character education, and youth behavior management into HRD policy offers a promising alternative framework—one that recognizes the centrality of family as a site of behavioral governance and human capital formation.

Recent empirical findings from urban centers in Southeast Asia suggest that family-based programs, when aligned with community education and health services, can reduce drug initiation rates and improve social cohesion (Li et al., 2024). Such models are particularly valuable in mid-sized cities like Palopo, where adolescents often fall between the cracks of formal institutional support systems. Family-centered approaches offer scalability, contextual sensitivity, and cultural relevance that top-down models often lack.

5. Synthesis and Theoretical Gap

Despite the extensive body of work on adolescent development, drug prevention, and parental roles, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the strategic positioning of parental involvement and character education within human capital development (Xiong et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2023). Most studies continue to treat these issues through sociological or psychological lenses, often detached from HRD theories and frameworks. Moreover, empirical data from secondary cities in the Global South—such as Palopo—are underrepresented in both academic discourse and policy formulation.

This study seeks to bridge that gap by reconceptualizing parental involvement and character education not only as protective social behaviors, but as integral components of strategic HRD in vulnerable communities (Fahmi et al., 2024; Mumtazah et al., 2023). By examining real-life experiences of youth and parents in Palopo, this study contributes to the emerging narrative that views the family not just as a unit of care, but as a developmental institution that shapes the ethical and behavioral dimensions of human capital.

RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employs a **qualitative-descriptive research design** aimed at exploring the role of parental involvement and character education in preventing adolescent drug

abuse (Adolph, 2016; Fahmi et al., 2024). The qualitative approach was selected to gain deep, contextualized insights into the lived experiences of adolescents and their families, particularly regarding behavioral dynamics, communication patterns, and educational values. This design is suitable for understanding complex social phenomena that are embedded in cultural and emotional contexts.

2. Research Location and Participants

The research was conducted in **Palopo City**, South Sulawesi, Indonesia—a mid-sized urban area experiencing a rise in youth-related drug abuse cases. The location was selected due to its socio-cultural diversity and limited institutional support mechanisms for behavioral prevention among youth.

Participants were selected using **purposive sampling**, targeting two groups:

1. **Adolescents aged 15–35** with a history of drug use (n = 15)
2. **Their parents or guardians** (n = 15)

The inclusion criteria for adolescent participants were: (1) being in the recovery or post-use phase, (2) residing with at least one parent, and (3) willingness to participate voluntarily. Parental participants were required to have lived with the adolescent during their period of drug use and provide informed consent.

3. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted between **March and April 2025**, using the following techniques:

- a) **Semi-structured in-depth interviews:** Conducted separately with adolescents and their parents. Interview protocols included open-ended questions about parenting styles, emotional relationships, character values, peer influences, and drug use history (Wang et al., 2022).
- b) **Participant observation:** Researchers visited participants' homes to observe parent-child interaction dynamics, focusing on communication style, household atmosphere, and family routines (Krupsky et al.2021).
- c) **Document analysis:** Secondary data, such as BNN reports, local education programs, and community intervention records, were used to contextualize and triangulate primary data (Arwan et al.2023).

4. Research Instrument

The primary instrument was a **semi-structured interview guide**, developed based on existing literature (Adolph, 2016; Asgari et al., 2021). Triggers for drug use

1. Parenting quality and communication
2. Family structure and emotional support
3. Perceived influence of character education
4. Peer and media influence

Field notes and audio recordings were used to ensure accuracy, with participants' identities anonymized for confidentiality.

5. Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, consisting of three main steps:

- a) **Data Reduction:** Transcripts were reviewed, and irrelevant or repetitive information was excluded. Coding was applied to highlight key themes.
- b) **Data Display:** Thematic patterns were categorized and visualized in matrices to identify cross-participant similarities and differences.
- c) **Conclusion Drawing:** Interpretations were developed based on dominant themes and linked to the research objectives and theoretical frameworks. Triangulation across interview, observation, and document data ensured the validity of findings.

6. Ethical Considerations

The research was approved by the university's research ethics board. All participants were informed of their rights, ensured confidentiality, and signed informed consent forms. Sensitive information was handled with strict privacy protocols, especially considering the criminal and psychological aspects of drug use history.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the role of parental involvement and character education in preventing adolescent drug abuse, based on qualitative data collected from 15 adolescents and their respective parents in Palopo City. Thematic analysis revealed three dominant themes: (1) peer influence as a primary trigger, (2) family dysfunction and emotional neglect, and (3) limited parental knowledge on character education.

First, peer influence emerged as the most dominant factor contributing to initial drug experimentation. Approximately 80% of adolescent participants reported being introduced to narcotics through social circles, particularly among older or more experienced peers. This finding aligns with (Henneberger et al., 2021; Volkow et al., 2024), who emphasized that adolescent relapse is often associated with peer environments that normalize drug use. Participants expressed a desire to gain social acceptance or avoid rejection, which often overrode their internal reservations or parental warnings.

Second, emotional distress and family disharmony were key underlying conditions that made adolescents vulnerable to drug abuse. Nearly 50% of the youth indicated that family conflicts, such as parental divorce or ongoing arguments at home, led to feelings of isolation, frustration, or low self-worth. These emotional states became triggers for seeking escape through drug use. Lawrence & Adebowale, (2023) and Luk et al., (2023) likewise highlight emotional coping deficits as a strong predictor of substance misuse among Indonesian youth. In this study, several parents admitted difficulty in managing emotional closeness, especially when facing economic or marital stress.

Third, while most parents acknowledged the importance of moral guidance, only a minority actively practiced structured character education at home. About 60% of parental participants lacked a clear understanding of how to integrate values like empathy, discipline, or resilience into daily routines. Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, (2021) Many relied solely on religious teachings or brief warnings rather than consistent behavioral modeling. A study by Karim et al., (2022) supports this finding, revealing that in low- to middle-income families, structured character formation is often overlooked or left to formal education systems.

However, households that demonstrated strong emotional bonds, mutual respect, and routine dialogue reported better outcomes. Adolescents in these families exhibited greater resistance to peer pressure and were less likely to relapse after rehabilitation. These cases

support the argument that family-based behavioral governance, when paired with intentional value-based parenting, significantly reduces the risk of adolescent drug involvement.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the complex and multi-layered nature of adolescent drug abuse, particularly in urban settings like Palopo. Using a qualitative approach, this research revealed three prominent themes: peer influence, family dysfunction, and the lack of structured character education at home. These findings align with several theoretical and empirical frameworks, offering both validation and new insights that contribute to the broader discourse on youth risk behavior and human capital development.

One of the most significant insights from this study is the powerful role of peer influence, which was cited by 80% of adolescent participants as the initial trigger for drug experimentation. This aligns with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which asserts that behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling, particularly in social environments where deviant behavior is normalized (Nawi et al., 2021). The adolescents in this study reported that drug-using peers acted as models and influencers—offering not only access to substances but also a sense of belonging. This reinforces the idea that adolescence is a critical period where external validation is often prioritized over internalized moral judgment.

However, the study also suggests that peer influence does not operate in a vacuum. The underlying vulnerability of family dysfunction was consistently evident among participants. Many adolescents came from households marked by divorce, financial hardship, emotional neglect, or authoritarian parenting (Broekhof et al., 2023). These conditions correspond with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which posits that immediate environments (microsystems) like the family profoundly affect individual development and behavior (Ballaret, 2025). When the family fails to provide emotional security and consistent communication, adolescents tend to seek emotional compensation from external environments—often unhealthy peer groups. These findings are supported by Paoloni & Modaffari, (2022), who demonstrated that family instability is a major antecedent of youth behavioral problems, including substance abuse.

In this context, the role of parental involvement becomes critical. Yet the findings show that many parents—while aware of the dangers of drugs—did not engage in consistent, dialogic, or value-based parenting. This reflects a disconnect between parental intentions and their behavioral strategies. According to the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), the family is a primary site for the formation of values, habits, and competencies that shape future productivity and societal participation (Ansori et al., 2023). In this light, parenting must be understood not merely as a moral duty, but as a strategic investment in developing psychological resilience and ethical judgment—key attributes of high-quality human resources.

The study also highlights the absence of structured character education at home. Despite verbal warnings or religious instructions, many parents lacked the pedagogical tools to transmit values such as empathy, discipline, or responsibility. This is consistent with (Ansori et al., 2023), who found that many Indonesian families equate character education with religious instruction, without embedding these values in daily practice.

From an HRD (Human Resource Development) perspective, character education is essential in shaping behavioral competencies that support long-term employability, adaptability, and civic engagement. Without this foundation, adolescents are left ill-equipped to resist temptations and make reasoned decisions in high-pressure environments (Soto et al., 2024).

Notably, this study also uncovered positive deviance—cases where adolescents demonstrated strong resistance to peer pressure due to supportive family dynamics. These households exhibited features of authoritative parenting: warmth combined with structure, emotional attunement, and open communication. According to Tomova et al., (2021) typology, authoritative parenting produces individuals with higher self-esteem and better decision-making skills. The adolescents from such families in this study reported that they were more confident in rejecting drug offers and had greater trust in their parental figures. This suggests that even in high-risk environments, family-based behavioral governance can act as a buffer against external threats (Mirzaei et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this study adds empirical depth to the strategic integration of family roles in national HRD planning. In contexts like Indonesia, where demographic dividends are often discussed in economic terms, the micro-foundations of human capital—such as character, emotional intelligence, and behavioral discipline—are frequently overlooked. Yet, as Harney and Gubbins, (2024) argue, sustainable HRD must begin not in the workplace, but in the household. When families are empowered with parenting tools, communication skills, and character education frameworks, they become effective institutions of pre-formal HRD.

Finally, these findings hold significant implications for policy and practice. Interventions aimed at reducing adolescent drug abuse must go beyond punitive or reactive models. Instead, preventive strategies that empower parents as behavioral managers and educators can yield long-term benefits for both individual well-being and national productivity. Schools and local governments should collaborate with families through workshops, counseling services, and value-based curricula to strengthen the parenting ecosystem. For professionals in law enforcement, such as the researcher, these insights also highlight the need to act not only as agents of control but as facilitators of family-centered prevention.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research confirm that adolescent drug abuse is not merely a result of external temptations but is deeply embedded in family dynamics and value formation processes. Peer influence plays a central role in initiating drug use, especially when adolescents lack strong emotional bonds and behavioral guidance from their families. This highlights the importance of the family as a micro-institution of behavioral governance. When parents actively engage through open communication, emotional support, and consistent value reinforcement, adolescents are better equipped to resist deviant behavior.

Furthermore, this study reveals that character education—when implemented consistently within the home—can significantly enhance adolescent resilience and decision-making. However, many parents lack pedagogical literacy in character building, often relying on religious instruction alone. As such, character education must be framed

not only as a moral imperative but as a strategic component of national human capital planning.

By contextualizing these findings in the city of Palopo, this study fills a literature gap concerning youth risk behavior in secondary cities of Indonesia. It also emphasizes the need for cross-sector collaboration between families, schools, and local governments to institutionalize preventive strategies. For practitioners in law enforcement and community development, the findings suggest that strengthening family capacities may be more effective than punitive approaches. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing discourse that places families at the center of sustainable human resource development, especially in emerging communities facing complex social challenges.

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