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Research Article

Juvenile Drug Involvement in Digos City: Profiles, Perceptions of Legal Consequences, and Underlying Causes and Effects

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the profiles and characteristics of the problem, explore how minors perceive the legal consequences of their involvement in drug-related activities, and describe the causes and effects of juvenile drug-related delinquency in Digos City through a qualitative approach. The researchers collected insights through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with key individuals familiar with the situation. Official records from the Digos City Police Station and local barangay peace and order councils from 2019 to 2024 were thoroughly reviewed to strengthen the findings. Thematic analysis was used to organize and interpret the data. Findings reveal that Zone 1 Digos City was reported to have 2 cases in the year 2022, with school dropout status. This contributes to the commission of other crimes, such as theft, rape, and physical violence, which results to increased fear, violence, and a breakdown in public confidence. The findings also pointed to a concerning gap in legal awareness among minors involved in drug-related incidents in Digos City. Many participants recognized the risk of police apprehension, but their grasp of legal procedures and minors' rights was limited and inconsistent. Several participants shared that conversations about the law were rarely held at home, reflecting a broader lack of parental guidance and community-level legal education. Based on the problem tree analysis, the root causes of juvenile drug-related delinquency in Digos City include parental absence and weak family monitoring, which reduce emotional support and guidance during critical developmental years. The researchers call for a strengthened, city-wide multi-agency intervention focused on legal literacy, family education, and expanded access to rehabilitation and mental health services. Strengthening the Alternative Learning System (ALS) and offering hands-on skills training for out-of-school youth must be a top agenda. Just as vital are programs that engage young people in sports, sustainable livelihood opportunities, and the creation of discreet and secure channels for reporting delicate or personal concerns.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Drug-related offenses involving minors are a growing threat to public safety across the globe. Youth involvement in drug use and small-scale distribution endangers their future and directly undermines community peace and order. Although various laws and local programs are in place to address these issues, reports from both the police and social welfare offices indicate a troubling trend: juvenile drug offenses continue to emerge, suggesting that current preventive efforts may not be fully effective. More importantly, many minors appear to lack a clear understanding of the legal consequences tied to their actions, which further complicates rehabilitation and deterrence efforts. Communities endure to grapple with incidents that disturb peace and order. This mounting issue demands a deeper examination to formulate context-specific responses (City Social Welfare and Development Office [CSWD], 2025; Dangerous Drugs Board [DDB], 2023).

Across the globe, drug abuse has been recognized as a contributory factor to juvenile delinquency. Adolescent involvement in drug activities poses a serious threat to public safety. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) identifies peer influence, unstable family environments, and socio-economic pressures as key drivers of youth participation in illegal substances. Research shows that many minors globally lack a clear understanding of the legal consequences of drug offenses, often engaging in high-risk behavior without grasping its long-term impact. In response, countries have expanded school-based prevention programs and rehabilitation-focused initiatives to both deter youth involvement and improve legal awareness.

In the Philippines, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA, 2023) reports that minors represented roughly 2 percent of all drug-related arrests from 2020 to 2022, totaling more than 1,600 individuals under 18. These figures show patterns of juvenile participation in illegal drug activities despite the existence of the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 (RA 9165).

While Republic Act No. 9344 (Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006) establishes clear safeguards and intervention mechanisms for the protection and rehabilitation of minors, national assessments, such as the joint 2019 study by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Philippine Development Plan Board (PDPB), reveal consistent implementation gaps. Many local government units lack the capacity to effectively support at-risk youth. In Digos City, systemic deficiencies in social welfare infrastructure remain entrenched, including a shortage of full-time social workers, irregular funding streams, and the absence of structured diversion and rehabilitation pathways. These institutional weaknesses are compounded by limited community engagement and weak inter-agency coordination among schools, law enforcement bodies, and welfare offices, resulting in fragmented and reactive interventions.

Research by the Preda Foundation and the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council further highlights a widespread deficit in public awareness of key protective laws, particularly Republic Act No. 9344 and Republic Act No. 9165, which limits the reach of preventive education and undermines community capacity

to shield minors from exploitation and unlawful involvement. These systemic and informational shortcomings are reflected in recent local trends. Between 2019 and 2024, Digos City recorded a marked increase in the number of minors implicated in drug-related activities. City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWD) data reveal no recorded cases in 2019 and 2020, but in 2021, two boys aged 16 and 17 were formally charged under Republic Act No. 9165, signaling the re-emergence and likely underreporting of juvenile drug offenses in the area.

Between 2022 and 2024, Digos City recorded a sharp rise in drug-related offenses involving minors. In 2022, three boys aged 15 and 16 were involved in such cases. The number rose in 2023, with four minors, both male and female, aged 15 to 17 implicated. By 2024, an additional three teenage boys were documented, raising the total number of minors involved to 12 over a four-year span. This growing trend calls for immediate, focused, and long-term action.

Although the City Anti-Drug Abuse Council (CADAC) and various barangay initiatives have taken steps to address the issue, the persistent increase in drug-related offenses involving minors reveals ongoing deficiencies in local efforts, especially in terms of law enforcement, public education, and access to rehabilitation services. Mendoza *et al.* (2020) emphasize that while preventive measures exist in Digos City, they often overlook the root causes of youth drug involvement: poverty, low legal awareness, and weak family and community support. It is in this light that this study is given premium. It is carried out to determine the profiles and characteristics of the juvenile drug involvement, explore how minors perceive the legal consequences of their involvement in drug-related activities, and describe the causes and effects of juvenile drug-related delinquency in Digos City.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Public Safety and Security Conditions of the Area according to BESTLEAPS/HE

2.1.1. Basic key leader information

In Digos City, Davao del Sur, strong leadership plays a vital role in upholding public safety and fostering community welfare. The City Mayor, as the local chief executive, leads the formulation and implementation of crime prevention and security strategies. As the chief executive, the mayor helps ensure unified efforts to curb criminal activity, protect citizens, and encourage meaningful civic participation. These collaborative efforts are indispensable in addressing local safety concerns and building trust between the government and the people it serves. The mayor is responsible for making sure that law enforcement agencies, specifically the Digos City Police Station, are properly equipped and supported to address drug-related offenses involving minors and to maintain peace and order across the city.

In the study conducted by Campoy and Campoy (2022), barangay-based interventions and efforts in Dipolog City like youth counseling, sports programs, and vocational training facilitated out-of-school youth swing from delinquent behaviors to a more constructive, community-oriented activities. In light of these findings, the Digos City government has initiated a more sustainable programs aimed at curbing juvenile delinquency



through the promotion of community involvement and implementation of strategic initiatives for youth development.

2.1.2. Environmental condition

Digos City, covering approximately 287 km², stretches from the western coastline of Davao Gulf into rolling hills and foothills of Mount Apo (Discover Davao City, n.d.; What's the Weather, n.d.) thanks to its diverse terrain. Digos City experiences a tropical monsoon climate, with an annual average rainfall of approximately 1,800 mm. The wet season typically occurs from June to November, while the period from December to May remains comparatively dry (What's the Weather, n.d.). This climate favors the cultivation of rice, corn, coconut, and various vegetables; however, excessive rainfall frequently leads to flooding in low-lying barangays, hampering transportation and damaging infrastructure. The northern barangays of Digos City, characterized by rugged hills and mountainous landscapes, contend with inherent structural limitations that impede the consistent delivery of essential services and targeted intervention programs. Efforts to curb juvenile delinquency and drug abuse are hindered by challenging terrain and weather-related access issues. Limited mobility impedes outreach and undermines consistent support for at-risk youth, especially in remote communities.

2.1.3. Socio-cultural structure

Digos City's urban-rural dynamics create uneven family environments that directly affect youth supervision. Some households provide consistent guidance, while others face poverty, parental absence, or strained intergenerational relationships, increasing minors' exposure to risky behaviors. Research by Daria *et al.* (2025) shows that adolescents from stable, supportive homes are far less likely to engage in drug use, whereas those from neglectful or conflicted households exhibit higher rates of delinquency. These findings underscore the decisive influence of family conditions on youth development and decision-making.

2.1.4. Transportation system

Tricycles dominate local transport, while habal-habal serves as the primary option in remote barangays in Digos City. Daily bus routes link the city to major Mindanao destinations, but this mobility also exposes minors to drugs, negative peer influence, and unsafe situations. Weak regulation of transport services and terminals heightens youth vulnerability, as inter-city buses can introduce minors to external drug networks and unmonitored tricycles or habal-habal may facilitate illicit substance movement. In response, the city government has tightened vehicle registration and licensing standards and partnered with transport associations to implement anti-drug campaigns and awareness programs. These measures are critical to creating safer transit and protecting Digos City's youth (Digos City LGU, 2023).

2.1.5. Legal, law, and order

The legal framework governing public safety in Digos City directly influences juvenile involvement in drug-related offenses. Republic Act No. 9165, the Comprehensive Dangerous

Drugs Act of 2002, criminalizes the use, possession, and trafficking of illegal substances, establishing specific penalties for each violation (Official Gazette, 2002). However, when minors are implicated, Republic Act No. 9344, or the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 as amended by RA 10630, mandates a rehabilitative rather than punitive response, emphasizing diversion mechanisms and restorative justice approaches for children in conflict with the law (JJWC, 2015). Yet, translating these legal safeguards into effective enforcement remains problematic. Many youth offenders exhibit limited understanding of the legal repercussions they face, particularly the implications of repeated infractions. Compounding this issue, parental awareness of statutory duties, such as supervising their children's conduct and contributing to their recovery and social reintegration, is often insufficient. These lapses in legal knowledge, both among minors and their guardians, dilute the intended efficacy of protective statutes and highlight the pressing need for sustained legal education initiatives and enhanced collaboration among frontline institutions.

2.1.6. Economic condition

Agriculture remains the backbone of Digos City's local economy, with roughly 37% of the population relying on farming and fishing as their principal means of livelihood. The city is notably productive in key crops such as coconut, sugarcane, banana, mango, rice, and corn, commodities that are extensively cultivated across its rural barangays and serve as a vital source of income for many households (City Government of Digos, 2023). However, despite the stability offered by its agricultural sector, disparities persist—particularly in terms of access to educational and recreational services in outlying communities. These gaps tend to exacerbate the vulnerability of young people to drug use and other forms of social risk.

At the same time, Digos is undergoing a phase of economic diversification. Trade and investments have contributed to a consistent growth in the city's operational revenue and infrastructure expansion, gradually establishing Digos as a growing center for investment within the Davao Region. This shift has been supported by the initiatives of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Provincial Economic Development and Investment Promotion Office, both of which have spearheaded business forums to stimulate investor interest in fields such as agro-processing, renewable energy, eco-tourism, and light industry (DTI Davao del Sur, 2022). These strategic efforts aim not only to accelerate economic growth but also to provide employment avenues, especially for the younger population, thereby reducing their exposure to delinquent behavior and illegal drug activity.

Nonetheless, the promise of economic development must be balanced with strong social policy. The local government bears a critical responsibility in bridging the economic gains with sustained social stability, particularly through youth-centered initiatives in education, rehabilitation, and community-based engagement that deter involvement in drug-related incidents.

2.1.7. AFP, PNP, and Other LEAs/Allied Agencies

Addressing juvenile drug offenses in Digos City demands coordinated action among the AFP, PNP, and PDEA. Although



each agency has a distinct mandate, their coordinated operations significantly enhance the disruption of drug networks and the protection of at-risk minors. This integrated approach is critical in barangays like Tres de Mayo and Zone 3, where juvenile involvement in drug activities remains documented (Digos City Anti-Drug Council, 2023). Continuous inter-agency collaboration has demonstrably improved intervention outcomes. Santos *et al.* (2022) confirm that synchronized law enforcement efforts effectively dismantle organized drug operations while reducing youth participation. In communities such as San Jose and Aplaya, combined enforcement and targeted rehabilitation programs have successfully removed minors from syndicate influence and supported their reintegration (Digos City PNP, 2023).

2.1.8. Political Condition/Situation

Political leadership in Digos City directly determines the effectiveness of local public safety policies, particularly in addressing juvenile delinquency and drug-related offenses. The mayor, vice mayor, and city council collectively set priorities for crime prevention, social welfare programs, and inter-agency coordination. As Kreuzer (2024) notes, municipal executives in the Philippines exercise substantial discretion over law enforcement deployment and the operational focus of drug control measures.

Political will is decisive for youth-centered prevention. When city and barangay officials act in alignment, interventions are strategic, consistent, and impactful. By contrast, political disputes or budgetary conflicts disrupt program implementation, weaken law enforcement and social welfare initiatives, and leave critical protections for at-risk youth unaddressed.

2.1.9. Scientific and technological

Local authorities are leveraging advanced technology to strengthen prevention, improve data precision, and expand surveillance. The PNP and PDEA, working with local government units, use digital platforms to track crime patterns, identify high-risk areas, and implement real-time, data-driven strategies. This evidence-based approach ensures swift, targeted interventions while enhancing community-centered prevention and rehabilitation.

On the national level, modernization efforts are also accelerating. The PNP has begun integrating artificial intelligence, advanced surveillance systems, and improved ICT infrastructure to boost operations in both urban centers and more remote locations. These technological advancements bolster investigative capacity and promote data-driven policing, providing strategic value to cities like Digos, where juvenile involvement in drug-related activities remains a persistent and serious concern (BusinessWorld, 2023).

2.1.10. Health services and condition

Digos City's healthcare network, comprising public health centers, barangay health stations, and the Digos District Hospital, caters to basic medical needs. However, it lacks the capacity for specialized services, particularly in drug rehabilitation and mental health care for minors. Although general treatment access is relatively stable, youth-specific interventions for

substance abuse remain limited and underfunded, hindering effective recovery for affected individuals. Without specialized and sustained intervention, the risks of relapse, stigma, and social exclusion increase. Bautista and Lopez (2023) stress that without dedicated rehabilitation programs for minors, reintegration efforts are unlikely to succeed and long-term recovery remains out of reach.

2.1.11. Education

Digos City has a broad educational system that includes both public and private institutions from elementary to tertiary levels. One prominent educational institution in the city is the University of Mindanao – Digos College, a private non-sectarian school that offers courses in areas like Criminology and Information Technology. Alongside it, public schools such as Digos City National High School and the Davao del Sur State College campus cater to a significant portion of the local student body. However, these public institutions continue to face persistent challenges. These include overcrowded classrooms and a lack of adequate teaching materials. These are conditions that hinder teachers from effectively supporting students dealing with personal struggles like family problems, peer influence, or emotional distress.

Although drug education initiatives such as Barkada Kontra Droga (BKD), a joint program by the Department of Education and the Dangerous Drugs Board—are in place, their implementation across schools remains uneven and often lacks consistency. Many schools limit the program to one-time sessions rather than sustaining the comprehensive, long-term approach necessary to reduce youth drug involvement (Department of Education and Dangerous Drugs Board, 2023).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach to better understand the state of public safety and security in Digos City, Davao del Sur, with a specific focus on drug-related offenses involving minors. In line with its objectives, the research looked into the patterns, circumstances, and factors shaping juvenile drug cases in the city. The study also examined how young people perceive the legal consequences of their actions, using insights not only from official sources but also from the youth and professionals who interact with them. The study outlined pressing concerns linked to juvenile delinquency and recommended feasible, community-driven prevention strategies.

Semi-structured interviews with local police officers, barangay officials, educators, social workers, and key community stakeholders were endeavored through purposive sampling to ensure a comprehensive and contextually grounded analysis. Where appropriate and ethically sound particularly with the full consent of guardians and the minors involved interviews were also conducted with young individuals who had firsthand experience with drug-related issues.

These interviews provided valuable insights into how the community monitored youth drug offenses, how current preventive measures were working (or not), and how different sectors like law enforcement, education, and local government worked together to respond to the problem.

Aside from interviews, the study referenced official documents



and reports from the Digos City Police Station and the barangay peace and order councils. These records, covering the years 2019 to 2024, provided important historical context and helped trace patterns in juvenile drug-related incidents. By critically reviewing relevant literature, the researchers were able to reinforce and expand on the insights gathered from key informant interviews. Although primarily qualitative in design, the study applied thematic analysis reinforced by descriptive elements to identify recurring patterns and connect them with established trends and institutional data. By synthesizing firsthand narratives with official statistical records, it has developed a layered, evidence-driven portrait of youth participation in drug-related offenses in Digos City. This integrated approach provides a robust empirical foundation for formulating targeted, context-specific interventions that not only reinforce community-based public safety mechanisms but also confront the socio-cultural and structural determinants underpinning juvenile criminal conduct.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Profiles and characteristics of the problem

4.1.1. Affected Barangays or Areas

Findings indicate that Barangay Zone 1 in Digos City has a notable incidence of juvenile involvement in illegal drug activities, with adjacent Zone 2 also showing concerning cases involving students from Digos National High School. This proximity has raised attention among educators, parents, and community stakeholders. Official data from the Philippine National Police and the City Social Welfare and Development Office recorded two drug-related cases involving minors in Zone 1 in 2022.

The clustering of incidents suggests a geographic pattern, highlighting how local social and environmental conditions may increase youth vulnerability. Both zones exhibit overlapping risk factors like unstable family environments, strong peer pressure, and limited institutional oversight, that elevate the likelihood of minors engaging in illicit drug activity. The Dangerous Drugs Board (2022) notes that adolescents in urbanized areas, particularly near schools, face higher exposure to drug risks and recruitment, further compounded by poverty, peer influence, and limited constructive opportunities.

These findings point to the need for carefully targeted, area-specific interventions that address local drug networks and the structural factors contributing to juvenile involvement. Data-driven, localized strategies are essential to prevent and reduce youth participation in drug-related offenses effectively.

4.1.2. Common patterns and risk factors

According to the response of the participants, a recurring theme among juvenile offenders was school dropout status. This was frequently cited by police as a risk factor, with the absence of school supervision contributing to vulnerability:

"Mostly school dropouts." (Translated, PO_01)

Dropouts, according to both the data and interview feedback, are more likely to associate with deviant peers, engage in risky behavior, and fall outside the reach of school-based preventive programs. This aligns with research indicating that education acts as a protective factor against substance abuse and juvenile

delinquency:

"Most of them get involved because they have stopped going to school, started working, and ended up being influenced to using or selling drugs (often being ordered to do so)." (Translated, PO_03)

"It usually starts in school, where they form groups that eventually turn into gangs, and drugs become involved." (Translated, PO_02)

The recurring pattern of school dropouts among youth involved in drug offenses highlights the critical role of education in prevention. Leaving school removes key protective factors such as routine, adult supervision, and positive peer engagement. Without these supports, adolescents are more likely to fall into the influence of deviant peers and criminal behavior. Keeping youth consistently engaged in school is a vital defense against drug use and delinquency. Schools provide structure, routine, and a sense of belonging that guide students away from risky behaviors. Albert and David (2015) demonstrate that consistent school attendance reduces youth criminal activity by fostering sustained interactions with teachers and mentors, which create supportive networks that deter engagement in illegal behavior.

4.1.3. Threats to public safety

Community evidence indicates that adolescent drug use serves as a gateway to more serious crimes, including theft, sexual offenses, and actions that undermine public order, threatening both safety and social cohesion. Initial substance use often escalates quickly, with intoxication amplifying aggression and the likelihood of violent or predatory behavior.

Drug abuse impairs judgment, reduces self-control, and increases engagement in criminal acts. Addiction disrupts education, driving school dropout and long-term social marginalization. The low cost and ready availability of illegal substances further heighten youth vulnerability.

These patterns are consistent with World Health Organization data (2023), which links adolescent drug involvement to higher risks of aggression, delinquency, and social instability. The evidence underscores the urgent need for early, community-based interventions that prioritize rehabilitation, education, and sustained psychosocial support over purely punitive approaches.

4.1.4. Impact on peace and order

Minors' involvement in drug-related activities directly undermines community well-being, escalating public fear and eroding social trust. Residents begin to fear not only for their safety but also for the future of the youth in their neighborhoods. According to one police officer, the community's sense of security deteriorates when young individuals are linked to illegal drugs:

"When youth are involved in drugs, people become afraid—afraid for their safety, especially the other young people. Drugs really affect the mind. It clouds judgment, and from there, it becomes easier for them to do worse things like theft, sexual assault, even killings." (Translated, PO_01)

The gathered evidence paints a concerning picture of how juvenile drug involvement triggers a wider chain of social disruptions. This pattern highlights the urgent need for prevention and early intervention as critical strategies to protect



public order and ensure the well-being of youth. Legally, most of the documented offenses fall under Republic Act No. 9165, or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002. Case records show varying statuses. Some are clearly marked “with case,” indicating that formal charges have been filed, while others remain under preliminary investigation and are labeled as violations or “alleged” participation. These differences point to inconsistencies in how cases are handled and the extent of institutional follow-through. This variation may stem from the severity of the offense, the minor’s cooperation, or the discretion exercised by law enforcement and social workers.

From a public safety and security perspective, this data emphasizes a persistent and possibly increasing concern related to juvenile drug abuse and trafficking in Digos City. The recurrence of specific age groups and the predominance of male involvement in drug-related offenses suggest the need for more tailored and gender-responsive intervention programs. The continued occurrence of these cases through 2024 underscores the urgent need for sustained, community-based interventions.

4.2. Perception of minor on the legal consequences of their involvement in drug-related activities

4.2.1. Limited and partial awareness of legal consequences

The findings indicate that minors in Digos City possess only a partial and often disjointed grasp of the legal repercussions associated with drug-related offenses. While most recognize that arrest by law enforcement is a potential outcome, few demonstrate familiarity with the specific statutory provisions that apply to minors. Even when authorities fulfill their procedural duty to inform young offenders of their rights, the information is frequently conveyed in formal legal language that is inaccessible to those with limited education or without the presence of a responsible adult. Many minors remain vulnerable due to gaps in legal knowledge, limiting their ability to assert rights, navigate judicial procedures, or access rehabilitation effectively. These deficits have tangible consequences: youth lacking clear understanding of their legal obligations are far less able to benefit from diversion or reintegration programs. The UNODC (2021) emphasizes that reducing recidivism and reinforcing protective factors requires community-based legal education that is clear, contextually relevant, and culturally responsive.

4.2.2. Influence of social environment on knowledge and behavior

Findings confirm that peer groups and online interactions strongly influence minors’ engagement in risky behaviors. Many participants reported first encountering drugs through friends, either online or in their immediate environment. These accounts demonstrate how peer pressure, amplified by the accessibility and perceived anonymity of digital platforms, serves as a gateway to substance use. The overlap of online and offline social spaces accelerates exposure and normalizes harmful behavior before youth fully grasp the consequences. Most adolescents also reported receiving little legal guidance from families or schools. In this vacuum, peers dominate influence, often spreading misinformation and reinforcing unsafe behaviors. Without consistent adult engagement,

minors lack the foundation to make responsible decisions.

These observations align with Dembo and Wareham (2007), who found that teenagers in unstructured peer environments without steady adult oversight are more prone to delinquency, including drug use. The evidence underscores the urgent need for proactive adult involvement across both digital and physical spaces to mitigate these risks.

4.2.3. Support systems are limited but crucial

Several participants reported growing up with little to no family guidance, especially regarding legal awareness and how to respond to trouble. One youth put it plainly:

“I had no family to teach me what legal actions I should take.” (Translated, WMO_01).

Even in the absence of parental or familial guidance, some minors manage to find support in the most unexpected places. One participant recalled how their employer stepped in to help, saying, *“My employer supported me; they accompanied me to the police station”* (Translated, APP_03).

Although the primary responsibility of offering moral and legal support usually falls on parents or guardians, there are instances when others such as mentors, employers, or community members step forward to bridge that absence. When a family fails or refuses to provide assistance, these individuals often serve as a vital source of guidance, helping minors navigate the complex and often daunting legal system. Their presence can shape more than just the legal proceedings; it can significantly affect the young person’s capacity to heal, change, and return to society.

Support, whether emotional or logistical, holds tremendous weight. In times of instability, these figures act as steadying influences, delivering the kind of compassion and structure essential for meaningful rehabilitation. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP, 2020), such networks, whether rooted in family or community, serve as essential protective factors in the rehabilitation journey of young people.

4.2.4. Education as a preventive and corrective measure

For many of the minors interviewed, education stood out not only as a goal but as a lifeline. For some, this realization became a turning point. One youth said with conviction,

“I will really go back to school, so I won’t get into trouble again.” (Translated, KV_04).

In these cases, returning to school goes beyond catching up on academics. It becomes a personal declaration of change. Education, in this context, symbolizes a chance to rewrite one’s story, make better choices, and regain self-respect. It serves as a safe space for healing, a platform for growth, and a bridge to a purposeful and stable life.

Education is not merely informative; it is transformative. In communities where family support is weak or absent, schools serve as the primary mechanism for preventing criminal behavior and guiding youth toward rehabilitation. Education equips minors to reshape their lives, make responsible choices, and restore self-respect. By providing structure, moral guidance, and practical skills, schools enable youth to make sound decisions and reintegrate successfully into society. The



2024 UNESCO report confirms that programs integrating legal literacy, life skills, and values formation significantly reduce youth delinquency, fostering critical thinking, responsible behavior, and awareness of real-world consequences.

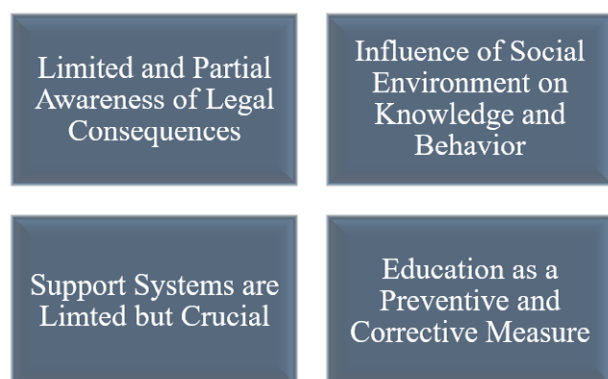


Figure 1. Emerging themes on the understanding of minor on the legal

4.3. Causes and effects of juvenile drug-related delinquency in digos

The problem tree analysis highlights the main drivers of drug-related offenses among minors in Digos City. Central to this issue is the lack of consistent parental guidance, which leaves children emotionally vulnerable and susceptible to peer influence. Without positive role models, many turn to peers, where initial drug use can quickly escalate into dependency, fueled by misinformation and limited awareness of legal consequences.

Deficiencies in local support worsen the situation. Rehabilitation and aftercare services are insufficient, leaving recovering youth at high risk of relapse while coping with emotional distress and social isolation.

Educational disengagement further increases vulnerability. Dropping out or chronic absenteeism denies minors access to skill-building, personal development, and structured environments that reduce high-risk behavior.

The consequences extend beyond individuals. Families experience emotional strain, public trust in institutions weakens, and community safety declines. Effective intervention requires a coordinated strategy: strengthening parental involvement, promoting legal literacy, expanding mentorship networks, and ensuring accessible rehabilitation and support. Lasting impact depends on addressing these root causes and providing clear pathways for minors to regain stability, purpose, and agency.

A minor's involvement in illegal drug activities impacts more than the individual, destabilizing families. Parents often confront fear, disappointment, and eroded trust, yet many prioritize engagement over estrangement, supporting rehabilitation. This resilience is reinforced when barangay officials, faith-based organizations, and civic groups coordinate efforts. Through moral guidance, community programs, and practical support, these actors provide immediate assistance while creating structured pathways for recovery and reintegration. By linking family support with institutional resources, such collaboration

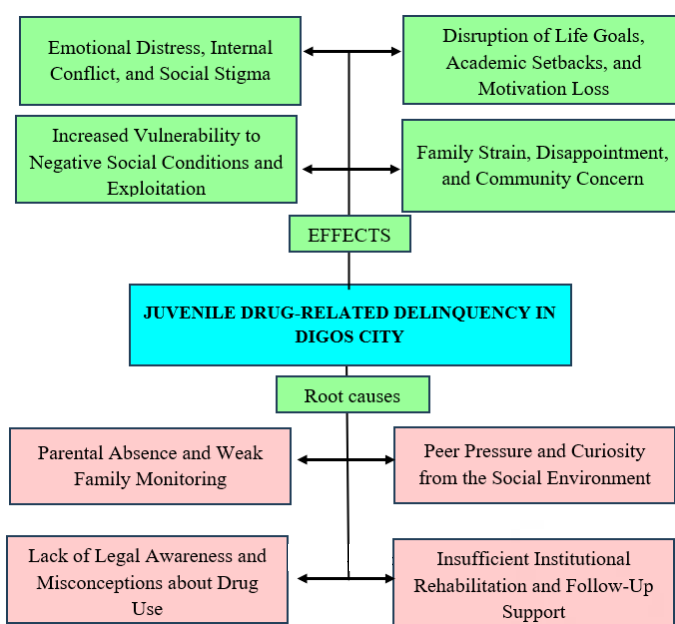


Figure 2. Problem Tree Analysis on Juvenile Drug-related Delinquency in Digos City

restores stability, strengthens accountability, and guides minors toward constructive societal participation.

The enduring emotional impact highlights the urgent need for intervention programs that address not only substance abuse but also the personal and social factors driving it. In raging circumstances, the consistent presence of family and community stands as a stabilizing influence, forming the bedrock upon which young people can rebuild their lives with renewed dignity and hope (Hawkins *et al.*, 1992).

5. CONCLUSIONS

In Zone 1 of Digos City, police and social welfare records show that two juvenile drug-related cases involving out-of-school youth were documented in 2022. The data suggests a clear correlation between educational disengagement and the commission of serious crimes such as theft, rape, and physical violence—offenses that directly threaten public safety and disrupt social order. The persistence of minors using or distributing illegal drugs fosters an atmosphere of fear within neighborhoods and erodes public confidence in the ability of local institutions to maintain peace.

Interviews revealed that many of these minors hold only a fragmented and superficial grasp of the legal consequences tied to drug-related offenses. While most are aware of police involvement in such cases, their understanding of the specific rights and protections accorded to minors under Philippine law is notably limited. This knowledge gap is compounded by the absence of meaningful family guidance on legal matters. Social influences, especially peer pressure and interactions through digital platforms, were identified as major factors shaping their choices and perceptions.

Problem tree analysis indicates that the primary root causes of juvenile drug-related delinquency in Digos City include prolonged parental absence and inadequate family supervision. These conditions deprive young people of



emotional support and consistent guidance during formative years, leaving them more susceptible to external pressures and high-risk behaviors.

In light of these findings, the researchers strongly recommend the institutionalization of a citywide, multi-agency framework that integrates family education seminars, targeted legal literacy campaigns, and expanded access to mental health and rehabilitation programs. Such measures, if implemented consistently, would address both the immediate risks and the deeper structural factors contributing to youth involvement in the drug trade. Programs should prioritize youth engagement through sports and livelihood programs, as well as improved confidential reporting procedures, the Alternative Learning System (ALS), and out-of-school youth skill development.

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