

# The Causes Of Harmful Habits In Children And The Possibilities And Ways Of Preventing Them Through Sport

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## Abstract

Throughout history, children have always been considered the most valuable asset of society at every stage of its development. Ensuring the proper physical, intellectual, moral, and aesthetic upbringing of children has consistently remained a relevant issue. However, there are times when certain gaps in the educational process result in the development of habits in children that are not welcomed by society. These are considered harmful habits. Addiction to alcohol, smoking, and substance use among adolescents are examples of such harmful habits. To prevent the emergence of such habits in children, families, schools, and society as a whole can employ a variety of methods. One of these methods is involving children in well-organized sports training and competitions. By engaging children in both team-based and individual sports activities, it is possible to prevent the development of harmful habits. However, it is equally important to conduct broad awareness campaigns about the dangers of smoking, alcohol, and drug use, alongside the benefits of sports. Timely and proper intervention against harmful habits is essential for a child to grow into a healthy and socially responsible individual.

**Keywords:** Physical education, harmful habits, alcohol, sports competitions, adolescent, children

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout all stages of historical development, children have always been considered the most valuable asset of society. Therefore, ensuring their intellectual, physical, and moral development must be organized at a high level both by families and the education system. To achieve this, it is essential not only to provide children with knowledge and skills in various fields but also to pay particular attention to their physical and moral development, social behavior, and daily habits (Guliyev, 2021). In fact, a child's behavioral patterns and lifestyle choices, which often emerge in early years, tend to solidify over time, making early preventive measures especially important. In the strategic planning of the education system, this area has also received specific attention. Within the framework of strategic educational planning, physical education and sports policies are increasingly recognized as an integral part of the overall educational experience (Hardman & Green, 2011; Khalilov et al., 2024). These policies emphasize the importance of not only academic excellence but also holistic development. While physical education was once viewed as a supplementary academic subject, it is now considered vital for improving children's physical health and mental abilities (Ismayilov, 2022). Moreover, physical activity has been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders in children, contributing significantly to their emotional resilience and self-discipline. In the 21st century, globalization, technological advancements, and evolving societal expectations have led to profound changes in education. Recently, due to the rapid development of society in various spheres, some habits that are socially disapproved of have started to form and grow among children. These habits negatively affect their development as normal members of society. When repeated over time, such habits are categorized as harmful habits (Guliyev, 2020). These include behaviors such as smoking, substance use, excessive screen time, social withdrawal, and even aggression, which can have long-term consequences if not addressed. Since adolescence

is a period of rapid and multidimensional development, harmful habits tend to emerge and become entrenched more easily during this stage. Adolescents seek independence, self-affirmation, and experience emotional fluctuations. As a result, sometimes independently of their will, behaviors that are socially considered harmful may begin to develop. Harmful habits acquired during adolescence hinder future success in life and negatively affect psychological well-being and physical health (Kazdin, 2005). For instance, adolescents who engage in early smoking or alcohol consumption are statistically more likely to struggle with addiction and chronic health conditions in adulthood. Multiple factors contribute to the emergence and reinforcement of harmful habits, including schools, social environments, peer groups, family relationships, media, and emerging visual technologies (Bandura, 1977; Giddens, 2006). Bandura's social learning theory, in particular, highlights the influence of observational learning in adopting such habits, where children often imitate behaviors observed in their immediate environment or media representations. Addressing these issues, therefore, requires a multidimensional approach. Harmful habits not only impair physical health but also disrupt children's social relationships, damage their psychological well-being, and lead to regress in many areas of life. In order to prevent these habits, the causes of their formation must first be identified and addressed. Early detection and intervention are crucial to avoid serious consequences in the future (Guliyev, 2021). This necessitates the implementation of collaborative prevention strategies, involving families, educational institutions, and public health organizations working in unison. In conclusion, the protection of children from harmful habits is not solely the responsibility of a single institution but rather a collective obligation of society. As the future bearers of national development, children's comprehensive growth must be safeguarded through structured policies, community support, and, most importantly, through effective use of physical education and sports as tools for prevention and development. Recognizing and responding to early warning signs, while simultaneously promoting healthy alternatives such as regular physical activity, can significantly reduce the incidence of harmful behaviors in the younger generation.

## **1. Forms Of Harmful Habits**

Harmful habits can manifest in various forms. The most frequently encountered among adolescents include alcohol consumption, smoking, and drug abuse (Guliyev, 2020). These behaviors pose significant risks not only to the physical health of young individuals but also to their psychological development and social integration (Hardman & Green, 2011). Research by Donovan and Jessor (1985) emphasizes that early initiation of such habits can predispose adolescents to long-term social maladjustment and decreased life satisfaction.

### **1.1. Alcohol Consumption**

Initiating alcohol use during adolescence increases the risk of addiction, behavioral disorders, and delinquency in later life. In contemporary society, combating alcoholism has become one of the major challenges. As researchers have noted since ancient times, those addicted to alcohol were seen as "stains on society" (Hasanov, 2020). In today's world, the fight against alcoholism is critically important for societal development, as excessive alcohol use is linked with decreased productivity and social disintegration (Khalilov et al., 2024). Studies also highlight the significant public health burden caused by underage drinking worldwide (World Health Organization, 2018). Medical research shows that alcohol has more detrimental effects on the bodies of adolescents than on adults. Due to the faster pace of assimilation compared to dissimilation in the bodies of 14–18-year-olds, alcohol is absorbed more rapidly into the bloodstream, negatively affecting cellular metabolism, vision, the heart, and the liver. Continuous alcohol intake disrupts the endocrine system and impedes the development of reproductive organs (Guliyev, 2021). Furthermore, studies indicate that alcohol exposure during adolescence can alter brain development, leading to long-term cognitive impairments and emotional instability (Bandura, 1977; Squeglia et al., 2009). Neuroimaging research confirms that adolescent drinking is associated with decreased volume in brain regions responsible for executive functions (Crews et al., 2007). Alcohol also affects adolescents' moods and alienates them from aesthetics and culture. Adolescents who habitually consume alcohol tend to lose interest in literature, music, and sports, and fail to achieve social recognition (Ismayilov, 2022). For young girls, alcohol consumption

causes even more severe damage to the body and often leads to moral degradation and even criminal behavior (Kazdin, 2005; Hingson et al., 2006). Research further reveals gender-specific vulnerabilities, indicating higher risks of alcohol-related liver disease and psychological distress among adolescent females (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004). The first step in combating alcohol abuse among adolescents is identifying the root causes of their inclination toward this harmful habit. Research shows that lack of family supervision, peer pressure, media influence, and unstructured free time significantly contribute to this trend. Adolescents who aimlessly roam the streets or frequently attend entertainment venues are more prone to alcohol use, especially if they associate with older individuals who drink (Guliyev, 2021; Ismayilov, 2022). Community-level prevention programs targeting family involvement have shown promising results in reducing adolescent alcohol use (Spath et al., 2008). As students typically have 3–4 hours of free time after schoolwork, failure to use this time effectively can lead to boredom, prompting them to seek amusement through harmful means. Effective solutions require collaborative efforts from families, schools, and the broader community (Kazdin, 2005; Guliyev, 2020). Evidence supports that structured extracurricular activities and positive peer engagement serve as protective factors against underage drinking (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000).

In conclusion, preventing adolescent alcohol abuse necessitates early identification of risk factors and multifaceted intervention strategies involving the family, school, and community.

**Table 1. Summary of Alcohol Consumption Risks and Prevention**

Aspect	Details	References
Health Risks	Brain development impairment, organ damage, mood disturbances	Guliyev (2021), Squeglia et al. (2009), Crews et al. (2007)
Social Consequences	Loss of social recognition, alienation, moral degradation	Ismayilov (2022), Kazdin (2005)
Contributing Factors	Peer pressure, lack of supervision, media influence, boredom	Guliyev (2021), Spoth et al. (2008), Mahoney & Stattin (2000)
Prevention Strategies	Family involvement, structured activities, community collaboration	Kazdin (2005), Guliyev (2020)

### 1.2.Smoking

Another widely observed harmful habit among adolescents is smoking. Tobacco use remains one of the leading causes of preventable disease and premature death globally (World Health Organization, 2021). Initiation of smoking at an early age significantly increases the likelihood of long-term nicotine addiction and related health complications (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Adolescents who smoke are also more likely to engage in other risky behaviors such as alcohol use and drug consumption (Kandel & Chen, 2000). To prevent this, adolescents should be actively involved in endurance sports such as middle- and long-distance running, swimming, and cycling. Research shows that regular physical activity reduces the urge to smoke by improving mood and reducing stress, which are common triggers for tobacco use (Faulkner & Biddle, 1999). Additionally, involvement in competitive sports enhances self-esteem and promotes a sense of achievement, which can serve as protective factors against smoking initiation (Tammelin et al., 2003). Regular participation in competitions and rewarding achievements can deter smoking by reinforcing healthy lifestyle choices. Furthermore, education programs specifically targeting youth athletes have been effective in increasing awareness about the harmful effects of smoking and its negative impact on athletic performance (McCracken et al., 2007). Simultaneously, adolescents must be clearly informed that smoking significantly impairs athletic performance and respiratory health, leading to heart problems and psychological dependency (Hasanov, 2020). Nicotine and other chemicals in cigarettes reduce lung capacity, impair oxygen transport, and cause inflammation, all of which compromise physical endurance and recovery (Wang et al., 2016).

Public health campaigns combined with school-based interventions that promote physical activity and educate about smoking risks have demonstrated considerable success in reducing smoking rates among adolescents

(Thomas et al., 2015). Parental support and peer influence also play crucial roles in prevention efforts (Simons-Morton & Farhat, 2010).

In conclusion, engaging adolescents in endurance sports and comprehensive education programs effectively reduces smoking initiation and promotes healthier lifestyles.

**Table 2. Summary of Smoking Risks and Prevention**

Aspect	Details	References
Health Risks	Nicotine addiction, respiratory impairment, cardiovascular disease	WHO (2021), Wang et al. (2016)
Behavioral Associations	Increased risk of other substance use and risky behaviors	Kandel & Chen (2000)
Prevention Strategies	Endurance sports involvement, competitions, education programs	Faulkner & Biddle (1999), McCracken et al. (2007), Thomas et al. (2015)
Influencing Factors	Parental and peer support, awareness of health effects	Simons-Morton & Farhat (2010)

### 1.3. Drug Abuse

Drug addiction not only disrupts the adolescent's psychological condition but also distances them from family, school, and society. The initiation of drug use during adolescence is particularly concerning due to the ongoing development of the brain, which is especially vulnerable to the neurotoxic effects of narcotics (Squeglia et al., 2009). Narcotic substances create both psychological and physical dependence and cause irreversible harm to brain function and the body overall (Volkow et al., 2016).

Drug use typically begins out of curiosity or experimentation and gradually escalates into dependency, impairing behavior, cognition, and social relationships (Brook et al., 2016). This progression can lead to serious long-term consequences including cognitive deficits, mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression, and increased risk for criminal behavior (Kandel & Logan, 1984). Moreover, adolescents with substance use disorders often experience academic decline and reduced occupational prospects, limiting their potential for successful adulthood (Hallfors et al., 2002). Peer influence and social environment play critical roles in the initiation and continuation of drug use among adolescents (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). Family dysfunction, lack of supervision, and exposure to drug-using peers increase vulnerability (Hawkins et al., 1992). Additionally, media portrayals and accessibility of drugs contribute to normalization and increased experimentation rates (Primack et al., 2009). Effective prevention and intervention strategies include school-based education programs, family therapy, and community engagement aimed at improving social skills and coping mechanisms (Tobler et al., 2000). Early identification and treatment are crucial to mitigate the long-term effects and to support rehabilitation and reintegration (Winters et al., 2014).

In conclusion, comprehensive strategies that address psychological, familial, and social factors are essential to prevent and reduce drug abuse among adolescents, safeguarding their development and future wellbeing.

**Table 3. Summary of Drug Abuse Risks and Prevention Strategies**

Aspect	Details	References
Health Risks	Brain development impairment, cognitive deficits, mental health disorders	Squeglia et al. (2009), Volkow et al. (2016)
Behavioral Impact	Social withdrawal, academic decline, criminal behavior	Brook et al. (2016), Hallfors et al. (2002)
Contributing Factors	Peer pressure, family dysfunction, media influence	Dishion & Tipsord (2011), Hawkins et al. (1992), Primack et al. (2009)
Prevention & Intervention	School education, family therapy, community programs	Tobler et al. (2000), Winters et al. (2014)

## 2. possibilities and ways to prevent harmful habits

One of the most effective tools in combating harmful habits is the organized implementation of well-structured sports activities. Sports participation supports not only children's physical and psychological development but also enhances their social and moral competencies (Ismayilov, 2022; Hasanov, 2020). Empirical research shows that engaging in regular physical activity contributes to improved self-regulation, reduced risk-taking behavior, and better emotional health among adolescents (Lubans et al., 2016; Biddle & Asare, 2011). It does not merely equip them with physical skills—it also strengthens their self-confidence, character, and emotional stability. Because children frequently encounter stressful situations during training and competitions, they develop resilience and positive coping mechanisms, which help them deal with challenges in everyday life (Eime et al., 2013).

Through active engagement in sports, children's motivation and self-perception improve, leading to a decreased inclination toward harmful habits (Petitpas et al., 2005). Adolescents should be made aware that addiction to alcohol gradually erodes one's sense of moral responsibility, dignity, and ability to reflect on consequences. Such youth often become indifferent to social events, lose respect in their families, peer groups, and educational settings, and may replace respect with resentment (Kazdin, 2005).

On the contrary, participation in sports fosters discipline and enhances an individual's reputation within the school, family, and society (Hardman & Green, 2011). Regardless of the type of competition, an athlete is not only representing themselves but also their team and broader community. This promotes a sense of responsibility, perseverance, and the ability to overcome difficulties, while also nurturing patriotism and team spirit (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Sports and substance use present fundamentally opposing outcomes in shaping one's personality, where the former cultivates positive developmental assets and the latter leads to deterioration of physical and moral health.

In conclusion, sports serve as a holistic preventive strategy that empowers youth with critical life skills, emotional resilience, and social connectedness, thereby significantly reducing the likelihood of engaging in harmful habits. The combined effort of families, schools, and community organizations to promote structured sports programs is essential in fostering healthier generations.

**Table 4. Summary of Prevention through Sports and Physical Activity**

Prevention Aspect	Description	References
Physical & Psychological Benefits	Enhances self-confidence, emotional stability, resilience	Ismayilov (2022), Eime et al. (2013), Lubans et al. (2016)
Social & Moral Development	Improves discipline, responsibility, team spirit, and patriotism	Hardman & Green (2011), Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005)
Reduction of Harmful Habits	Decreases risk-taking behavior, substance use inclination	Petitpas et al. (2005), Kazdin (2005), Biddle & Asare (2011)
Community & Family Role	Support and structured engagement in sports foster healthier lifestyle	Hasanov (2020), Ismayilov (2022)

## 3. THREE MAIN FACTORS THAT DRIVE ADOLESCENTS TOWARD ALCOHOL USE

Research indicates that adolescents' tendency to consume alcohol usually stems from three primary motivations (Guliyev, 2020). These motivations are influenced by psychological, social, and environmental factors that interact in complex ways during adolescence (Windle et al., 2008; Patrick & Schulenberg, 2014). Understanding these core drivers is essential for designing effective prevention and intervention strategies tailored to youths' developmental needs (Brown et al., 2008).

Identifying and addressing these primary motivations provides a foundation for targeted approaches to reduce alcohol use among adolescents, ultimately supporting healthier developmental trajectories and reducing long-term negative outcomes.

### 3.1. Self-Persuasion

Adolescents may convince themselves that drinking is beneficial, often associating alcohol consumption with stress relief, social acceptance, or increased confidence (Sher & Grekin, 2019). However, it is essential to explain that alcohol's euphoric effects are temporary and deceptive. Once these effects diminish, tension and anxiety frequently increase, exacerbating emotional discomfort rather than alleviating it (Sayette, 2017). Research has shown that boredom and emotional distress are significant triggers for adolescent substance use, often arising from a lack of meaningful engagement or purpose (Wills & Dishion, 2004; Cooper et al., 2016). Encouraging adolescents to participate in sports can provide a constructive alternative. Sports involvement has been linked to improved mood, increased self-esteem, and healthier coping mechanisms (Lubans et al., 2016). Even small successes in competitions can offer rewarding experiences that reduce the need for maladaptive behaviors like alcohol consumption (Ekelund et al., 2017).

To effectively counter self-persuasion, adolescents need education about the fleeting nature of alcohol's pleasurable effects and support in engaging with fulfilling activities such as sports, which provide long-term emotional benefits and reduce the likelihood of harmful drinking behaviors.

**Table 5. Key Points on Self-Persuasion and Prevention Strategies**

Aspect	Details	References
Adolescent Belief	Alcohol provides stress relief and social acceptance	Sher & Grekin (2019)
True Effects of Alcohol	Euphoric effects are short-lived; anxiety and tension increase	Sayette (2017), Cooper et al. (2016)
Triggers for Drinking	Boredom and lack of meaningful engagement	Wills & Dishion (2004)
Preventive Strategy	Encourage sports participation and highlight small achievements	Lubans et al. (2016), Ekelund et al. (2017)

### 3.2. Peer Pressure

To reduce peer influence, schools, parents, and community organizations must take joint responsibility. They must prevent the formation of unsupervised youth groups that loiter aimlessly. These adolescents should be directed toward sports clubs and introduced to the achievements of successful athletes. Replacing negative peer influence with a healthy collective environment—especially through team sports such as volleyball, football, basketball, and handball—has shown to be effective. In such environments, adolescents are required to stay healthy and focused, ultimately moving away from harmful behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Dishion & Tipsord, 2011).

Team sports, where all members work toward a shared goal, foster a sense of interdependence and collective success. These individuals tend to develop a stronger awareness of collaboration and mutual responsibility. In contrast, individual sports cultivate self-reliance, confidence, and the ability to face challenges independently (Hardman & Green, 2011; Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009).

When engaging adolescents in sports, it is crucial to consider their physical condition, psychological state, social engagement level, character traits, and motivation (Smith, 2015).

Encouraging adolescents to participate in structured sports activities creates a supportive social network that counters negative peer pressure, fostering positive behavior patterns and reducing the likelihood of alcohol use and other harmful habits.

### 3.3. Desire to Grow Up Quickly

Sometimes adolescents start drinking out of a desire to resemble adults, appear strong, or act courageously. In such cases, it is important to explain that strength, attractiveness, and health are not achieved through alcohol, but through consistent sports training. Role models should be presented from among distinguished athletes and veterans who achieved success without relying on harmful substances (Kazdin, 2005; Brown & Larson, 2009).

Meetings with renowned athletes and viewing documentaries that expose the consequences of alcoholism can help reinforce these lessons. Since most adolescent athletes aspire to reach elite levels, they must be informed of the detrimental effects of alcohol on sports performance (Smith, 2017; Pihl & Peterson, 1995). Providing evidence-based education on how alcohol impairs coordination, reaction time, and recovery emphasizes the incompatibility of alcohol use with athletic success (Reardon & Creado, 2014).

Addressing adolescents' desire to "grow up" quickly through positive role models and sports education promotes healthier choices by highlighting that true strength and maturity stem from discipline, dedication, and a healthy lifestyle rather than substance use.

#### 4. experimental evidence

To test the effectiveness of this approach, a one-year observational study was conducted in several urban and rural schools with students in grades IX–XI. In each school, one class was designated as the control group, and another as the experimental group. An anonymous survey was conducted at the beginning of the year to assess students' exposure to alcohol (Guliyev, 2021; Catalano et al., 2012).

In the experimental groups, under the supervision of physical education teachers, all students were involved in selected sports activities and frequent competitions based on a recommended program. Communication between teachers and parents was strengthened, and parents were encouraged to participate actively in the process (Ismayilov, 2022; Brown et al., 2015).

At the end of the year, the same anonymous questionnaire was administered. Results showed that in control groups, the number of students who had tried alcohol increased by 1–3 individuals, while in the experimental groups, the number of students with alcohol exposure significantly decreased or disappeared entirely (Kazdin, 2005; Smith, 2017).

The study also found that alcohol use and early exposure were more common in urban schools compared to rural schools. This disparity may be attributed to the limited free time of rural adolescents and their early involvement in socially beneficial labor (Guliyev, 2021; Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

The study demonstrates that structured sports programs combined with parental involvement and school supervision can effectively reduce alcohol exposure among adolescents. This approach fosters healthy habits and creates a protective environment that mitigates peer pressure and boredom, especially in urban settings where risk factors are more pronounced.

**Table 6. Experimental Evidence on Preventing Alcohol Use in Adolescents**

Factor	Control Group Outcome	Experimental Group Outcome	Key Influences
Alcohol exposure change	Increased by 1–3 students	Significant decrease or elimination	Participation in sports, parental involvement, teacher supervision
Urban vs. Rural Differences	Higher early exposure in urban schools	Lower exposure in rural schools	Free time availability, early engagement in labor
Intervention Components	None	Structured sports activities, parental communication	Physical activity, social support, engagement

## CONCLUSION

Harmful habits—especially smoking, drug use, and alcohol consumption—have profoundly detrimental effects on the physical, psychological, and social development of children and adolescents. These behaviors can stunt growth, impair cognitive functions, and disrupt emotional well-being, ultimately limiting the potential of young individuals to thrive in society. However, sport serves as one of the most powerful and multifaceted tools for the prevention of such habits, offering benefits that extend far beyond physical fitness. Participation

in sports significantly contributes to the holistic development of children, encompassing psychological resilience, physical health, social skills, and moral values. Regular engagement in sports activities fosters self-confidence and self-esteem, which are critical protective factors against the allure of harmful habits. As children face the challenges inherent in training and competition, they develop effective stress management techniques, enhancing their ability to navigate daily life pressures and reducing the likelihood of resorting to negative coping mechanisms such as substance use.

Furthermore, sports cultivate essential social competencies. Team sports, in particular, teach young participants the importance of cooperation, communication, and mutual respect. These experiences encourage positive peer interactions, create a sense of belonging, and build supportive social networks that can buffer against feelings of isolation and vulnerability—both of which are known risk factors for adopting harmful habits. By fostering healthy social environments, sports participation helps children to build meaningful relationships and develop empathy, both crucial for moral development.

In addition to social and psychological benefits, sports participation instills valuable life skills such as discipline, responsibility, emotional regulation, and perseverance. Through the structured routines of training and competition, children learn the value of hard work and delayed gratification, which are essential for making sound decisions and resisting peer pressure in adolescence and beyond. These lessons extend into academic settings and family life, reinforcing positive behavioral patterns and promoting overall well-being. Moreover, physical education and sports promote awareness and appreciation of one's body and health. Children who are regularly active tend to develop healthier lifestyle habits, such as balanced nutrition and adequate rest, which contribute to their long-term physical and mental health. The intrinsic motivation derived from sports achievements encourages adolescents to maintain a lifestyle that supports optimal health, reducing the appeal of harmful substances that threaten their physical capabilities and overall quality of life. The role of families, schools, and society in harnessing the preventive potential of sports cannot be overstated. Collaborative efforts between educators, parents, and community organizations are vital to creating environments where sports participation is accessible, inclusive, and encouraged. Schools can integrate physical education into their curricula with greater emphasis on its role in moral and social education, while families can support and model active lifestyles at home. Community programs can provide safe spaces and resources for youth sports, ensuring that children from diverse backgrounds benefit equally. Taking into account the extensive evidence supporting the protective effects of sports, it is clear that the scientific and systematic organization of physical education and sports within the educational framework is essential for effective prevention of harmful habits among adolescents. By investing in well-structured sports programs, providing adequate training for educators and coaches, and fostering a supportive social milieu, society can significantly reduce the incidence of smoking, drug use, and alcohol abuse among its youth. In conclusion, sport is not merely a form of physical activity but a critical instrument for the holistic development of children and adolescents. It empowers young people with the psychological tools, social skills, and moral grounding necessary to resist harmful influences and make positive life choices. Therefore, promoting and sustaining children's engagement in sports is fundamental to safeguarding their health and wellbeing and securing the future of a healthy, resilient society.

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