

Addressing Institutional Shortcomings in The Prevention of Drug Trafficking Offenses Among University Students in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This study evaluates the current architecture of prevention aimed at reducing offenses connected with the illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances among students of higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. As of 2025, 1,657,381 students were enrolled in 201 institutions, yet dormitory capacity covered only 8.8 percent of them. Prevention inspectors operate under workloads eight to ten times higher than international reference values. Recent national data show that the number of young people held liable for drug-related offenses rose by 74 percent over five years, with a 21 percent increase among university students (Otajonov, 2024). Drawing on social control, routine activity, social learning and strain theories, the article identifies structural gaps and reviews practice in Russia, Germany, Estonia and South Korea. Fourteen actionable recommendations are advanced, encompassing residential expansion, digital early-warning systems, psychological service reinforcement and inter-agency coordination. The findings support the modernization of campus prevention in line with the National Strategy for 2024–2028.

Keywords: Student drug offenses, campus prevention, narcotic trafficking, psychotropic substances, social control theory, digital monitoring, dormitory capacity, National Strategy 2024–2028, Uzbekistan.

Introduction: The rapid expansion of higher education in Uzbekistan has created both opportunities and new security challenges. By 2025 the country operated 201 tertiary institutions serving 1,657,381 students—approximately three times the enrollment recorded in 2017. Nearly 40 percent of this population (655,846 learners) is concentrated in Tashkent, intensifying the demand for effective on-campus risk management (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2025).

National statistics reveal a troubling upward trend among young people. Over the most recent five-year period the number of youths prosecuted for illegal handling of narcotic or psychotropic substances increased by 74 percent; the corresponding rise among university students reached 21 percent, while the figure for school pupils multiplied sixfold. In absolute terms, 5,728 young persons—including 117 students—were held criminally liable, and the number of

registered consumers aged 14–30 grew by 60 percent to 986 individuals (Otajonov, 2024). These developments coincide with the global increase reported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which recorded 296 million drug users worldwide in 2023—an increase of 23 percent (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023).

The Presidential Decree of 6 May 2024 (PF-73) approved the National Strategy for Combating Drug Addiction and Drug-Related Crime for 2024–2028. The Strategy explicitly prioritizes prevention inside educational institutions, the deployment of modern information technologies, and stronger multi-agency cooperation (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2024). Against this policy background, a systematic appraisal of campus prevention capacity and the formulation of realistic improvement measures have acquired both scholarly and practical urgency.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) maintains that weak attachment to family, school and conventional institutions elevates the probability of deviant behavior. In the Uzbek university setting, low dormitory provision, widespread private rentals and a substantial share of part-time students all reduce everyday guardianship and thereby amplify substance-related risk. Routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) identifies three necessary conditions for a criminal event: a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of capable guardians. Unsupervised residential environments satisfy the third condition and facilitate the circulation of controlled substances. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and strain theory (Merton, 1968) further illuminate pathways into substance use. Recent scholarship emphasizes that early detection of at-risk students depends on coordinated action by universities, families and law-enforcement bodies (Jabborov et al., 2023; Otajonov, 2024).

CAMPUS INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESIDENTIAL CAPACITY

National dormitory capacity in 2025 stood at only 146,117 places—8.8 percent of total enrollment. In Tashkent the coverage rate was 7 percent (45,784 beds) (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2025). The majority of students therefore live in privately rented accommodation characterized by minimal institutional oversight. First-year and part-time learners are particularly exposed to adaptation stress and reduced social control, conditions that practitioners identify as primary conduits for the onset of substance use and involvement in illicit distribution networks.

OPERATIONAL CAPACITY OF PREVENTION SERVICES

In 2025 the Ministry of Internal Affairs assigned 200 officers to higher education institutions, of whom 167 performed prevention functions. Only 52 of Tashkent's 95 establishments maintained a formal prevention post, staffed by 68 inspectors. The resulting average caseload exceeded 4,500 students per officer in the capital and reached 8,000–12,000 nationwide—eight to ten times international benchmarks (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2025).

STUDENT OFFENDING PATTERNS IN 2025

Official records registered 855 crimes committed by students in 2025, 46 of which involved narcotic or psychotropic substances (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2025). The highest concentrations appeared in Tashkent (20 cases), Andijan (11), Fergana (7) and Kashkadarya (7). Non-state and foreign-branch campuses displayed disproportionately elevated rates, consistent with weaker internal control and higher reliance on off-

campus housing. Full-time students accounted for 448 offenses and part-time students for 351, underscoring the greater exposure of the latter group to situational risk factors.

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL RISK MARKERS

Empirical and operational sources converge on the following risk constellation:

1. Acute stress and adaptation difficulties, especially among first-year cohorts;
2. Reduced parental oversight and isolation associated with private rentals;
3. Online promotion of controlled substances and anonymous “klad” distribution schemes;
4. Insufficient professional psychological support;
5. Limited legal literacy concerning criminal liability;
6. Peer-driven lifestyle norms that normalize experimental use (Otajonov, 2024).

STRUCTURAL DEFICIENCIES OF THE CURRENT MODEL

The prevailing prevention architecture exhibits several critical shortcomings:

- Inspector-to-student ratios far above sustainable international thresholds;
- Absence of integrated digital platforms for continuous risk monitoring;
- Predominantly reactive orientation of psychological and social support services;
- Fragile internal control in private and foreign-branch institutions;
- Underdeveloped channels for systematic engagement with students' families.

COMPARATIVE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Russia maintains average inspector caseloads of 800–1,200 students and dormitory coverage of 25–30 percent, supported by digital social-media monitoring. German universities house 40–45 percent of students on campus and employ two to four full-time psychologists per institution. Estonia's electronic screening platform keeps caseloads between 600 and 900. South Korea achieves residential provision above 50 percent under the “Clean Campus” initiative. These practices underscore four transferable priorities: expansion of supervised housing, alignment of staffing with international norms, introduction of digital early-warning systems, and enlargement of psychological capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fourteen concrete measures are proposed to operationalize the National Strategy for 2024–2028:

1. Residential expansion to at least 25 percent capacity by 2030, with priority for first-year and vulnerable students.
2. Increase prevention inspectors to a minimum of 300, reducing caseloads to 800–1,200 students.
3. Integrate socio-psychological screening and “klad”-monitoring modules into the HEMIS platform.
4. Scale professional psychological services to at least two–three full-time specialists per institution.
5. Establish consent-based parental notification and quarterly prevention seminars.
6. Mandate prevention structures and enhanced oversight in non-state and foreign-branch campuses.
7. Introduce a compulsory legal-literacy module covering Criminal Code Articles 273 and 276–278.
8. Deploy specialized online screening for part-time and distance-learning students.
9. Create a permanent inter-agency coordination platform with biannual meetings.
10. Establish regional research and monitoring hubs in major centers.
11. Localize proven international digital, psychological and residential models.
12. Secure dedicated institutional budgets and international grant co-financing.
13. Institutionalize annual performance monitoring and evaluation.
14. Intensify operational response to synthetic substances and online distribution channels, consistent with legislative improvements proposed by Otajonov (2024).

CONCLUSION

Campus prevention of drug-related offenses remains fragmented, reactive and under-resourced. Limited residential capacity, excessive inspector workloads, the absence of digital early-warning tools and weak family engagement constitute the principal structural drivers of elevated student vulnerability. Implementation of the fourteen measures outlined above, aligned with the National Strategy for 2024–2028 and informed by recent legislative analysis (Otajonov, 2024), would substantially reduce the incidence of narcotic- and psychotropic-substance offenses among university students and enable a decisive modernization of the national prevention architecture.

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