Background: The EU-Dap project was funded in 2002 by the European Commission in order to assess the effectiveness of a novel school-based prevention program based on a Comprehensive Social Influence approach. This paper summarizes the results from the multicenter cluster randomized trial designed to evaluate the behavioral changes associated to the curriculum, and present a preliminary identification of potential mediators of effects.

Methods: The “Unplugged” program consisted of 12 one-hour sessions delivered by class teachers to 12-14 years old students in seven European countries during the school year 2004-2005. Schools (n=170) were randomised to three intervention arms and a usual curriculum control arm. A pre-test survey was conducted before the implementation of the program (n=7079), and two follow-up surveys were conducted 3 and 15 months after the end of the intervention. A Multilevel Regression model was used to evaluate the effect of the program on substance use prevalence and on possible mediators, identified as factors related with substance use among controls pupils (see figures).

Results: The program was effective in preventing daily smoking, drunkenness episodes and cannabis use at the post-test. At the 15-month follow-up the effect on cigarettes use was lost while the effects on drunkenness and cannabis were maintained (Table 1). Among factors related with substance use among control pupils (see figures), expectations towards tobacco, alcohol and drugs use, attitudes towards drugs use and refusal skills are significantly changed by exposure to the program.

Conclusions: The EU-Dap study shows that the Unplugged program is effective in preventing tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use. The preliminary analyses of mechanisms of effect suggest that the program works reducing expectations towards drugs and increasing refusal skills.