Theoretical model of the European CSI program “Unplugged”

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Introduction

Unplugged is a Comprehensive Social Influence program designed by a group of European experts in the framework of the EU-Dap project. The program consists of 12 standard units, one-hour each, delivered by class teachers to adolescents 12-14 years old. It is a strongly interactive program including a training of personal and social skills with a specific focus on normative beliefs. It is based on Social learning, Life Skills, Health Belief model and theory of Reasoned Action-Attitude.

Social learning theory

Social learning theory was developed by Bandura in the 1960s. According to this theory, personality forms from interaction between environment, behaviours and individual’s psychological processes. Social learning theory emphasises the importance of observing and modelling the behaviour, attitudes and emotional reaction of others.

Social norms theory

The theory (Berkowitz, 1986) states that our behaviour is influenced by incorrect perceptions of how other members of our social groups think and act. The theory predicts that overestimations of problem behavior will increase these problem behaviors while underestimations of healthy behaviors will discourage individuals from engaging in them. The theory suggests that these peer influences are based more on what we think others believe and do (the “perceived norm”) than on their real beliefs and actions (the “actual norm.”) This gap between “perceived” and “actual” is referred to as a “misperception” and its effect on behaviour provides the basis for the social norms approach. One of the effects is to cause individuals to change their own behaviour to approximate the misperceived norm.

Health belief theory

The health belief model was developed by Rosenstock and is based on the concept that the perceived risk of disease and the perceived benefits of action to avoid disease are the key factors in motivating a positive health action. So, the provision of factual information about the negative effects and dangers of drugs will deter use or prevent substance abuse by creating negative attitudes towards drug use.

Life Skills

Life skills approach proposes that, although health-damaging behaviour is the result of a complex interaction between personal, social and environmental factors, behaviour essentially stems from individuals, and individuals should be a focal point for life skills education. The life skills approach is built around creating opportunities for young people to acquire skills that enable them to avoid manipulation by outside influences. It aims to help young people to achieve control over their behaviour while taking informed decisions that can lead to positive behaviour and values.

Reasoned Action-Attitude theory

The theory of Reasoned Action-Attitude by Fishbein and Ajzen proposes that behavioural intentions have two constituent parts: the individual’s attitude towards the behaviour and the social norms as perceived by the individual. Individuals may weight these differently in assessing their behavioural intentions. Therefore, drug use is a consequence of a rational decision (intention), the belief about this consequence and the social norms towards drug use. The reasoned action model is widely used to explain the motivation behind drug use and offers a convenient structure to examine the relative importance of attitudinal and normative considerations in forming the behaviour of individuals.

Conclusions and future work

Starting from the theoretical model of Unplugged it will be possible to study mechanisms of effect and to identify possible effective components.