



# WHAT CAN EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTIVENESS BETWEEN TWO SIMILAR SCHOOL-BASED UNIVERSAL PROGRAMMES FOR PREVENTION OF SUBSTANCE USE? THE US-EU CROSS-COUNTRY STUDY

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## Background

Trials conducted in different contexts have rarely been compared. Two similar prevention programmes targeting substance use were implemented in different contexts and had diverse outcomes.

- ✓ **Unplugged**, conducted in Europe, was successful in reducing drunkenness and cannabis use.
- ✓ **Take Charge of Your Life (TCYL)**, conducted in the U.S., was effective in reducing marijuana use and had an apparent iatrogenic effect on alcohol and cigarette use.

## Objective

To compare two prevention programmes implemented in different contexts, Unplugged and TCYL.

## Methods

1. Four assessors evaluated materials and implementations using a pre-defined evaluation form.
2. Prevalence rates of substance use in each study group were compared using chi-square tests.
3. Contextual factors such as country-specific policies and prevalence of substance use were also compared.

Table 1. Differences in program characteristics: Assessments of Unplugged and TCYL

Indicator	Unplugged	TCYL
<b>Deliverers</b>	Teachers	Trained police officers
<b>Program delivering setting</b>	In regular curriculum	Ad hoc lessons
<b>Booster sessions</b>	No	Yes
<b>Interactivity (% of hours devoted to interactive work)</b>	77.50	62.59
<b>Main components (% of time devoted to cited skills)</b>		
<b>Knowledge</b>	15.56	15.22
<b>Refusal skill</b>	7.38	8.72
<b>Intentions</b>	4.58	5.80
<b>Risk perception</b>	9.32	9.27
<b>Normative beliefs</b>	8.03	8.43
<b>Expectations</b>	6.04	8.04
<b>Communications skills</b>	10.04	7.75
<b>Self-esteem and self-efficacy</b>	6.56	1.95
<b>Drug attitudes</b>	4.77	6.27
<b>Assertiveness</b>	8.64	8.64
<b>Problem solving</b>	7.86	10.63
<b>Decision making</b>	7.50	8.45
<b>Total of main components</b>	96.25	99.18

## Results

1. Overall there were few differences between Unplugged and TCYL content. Class teachers delivered Unplugged and trained police officers delivered TCYL.
2. U.S. control students had greater exposure to other prevention interventions.
3. Baseline prevalence of alcohol and cannabis use was higher in the U.S. sample.
4. Policies appeared to be more restrictive in the U.S. for all substances.
5. Prevalence of smoking and drunkenness were greater in E.U. countries; cannabis consumption was greater in the U.S.

Table 2. Other prevention programming delivered in the control groups schools

Variables	Unplugged % (n=143)	TCYL % (n=63)	p-value <sup>a</sup>
<b>Number of schools having conducted:</b>			
<b>any prevention activity<sup>b</sup></b>	14.7	71.4	<0.001
<b>only other named interventions<sup>c</sup></b>	4.9	31.7	<0.001

<sup>a</sup> Chi-square test.

<sup>b</sup> Structured or non structured local activity (e.g., lesson by an expert or a former alcoholic).

<sup>c</sup> Structured, non local, prevention interventions (e.g., Life Skills Training).

## Conclusions

Proximal factors such as programme delivery and exposure in the U.S. control group to prevention programming appear to be influential in determining the differential effectiveness of Unplugged and TCYL. The impact of contextual factors remains unclear, and needs to be explored employing common protocols in future cross-national studies.

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