

Press Release

Final results of EU-Dap: the European Drug Addiction Prevention project

Substance abuse, including tobacco, drugs and alcohol use, is actually the most relevant single health problem in developed countries, accounting for 20% of all deaths and 22.2% of PYLLs. Four out of five users begin substance use before reaching the adult age, the scholar age is therefore the most appropriate for intervention.

Primary prevention is probably the most efficient way to tackle this problem, but, as for all preventive interventions, the need for evidence is urgent.

An International Conference have been organised in Lisbon by the European Monitoring Centre for Drug and Drug Abuse (EMCDDA), in 15-17 Decembre 2005. The conference aimed at the presentation of the results of the EU-Dap project.

EU-Dap is the first evaluation of an European program aimed at preventing drug and tobacco onset and alcohol abuse. The project, funded by European Commission in 2003, endeavour mobilized resources from 7 countries, 9 regional centres, 143 schools and more than 7000 adolescents.

In the population involved in the study, aged 12 to 14 years, 34.9% smoked, 8.2% used drug once in the life at the moment of the involvement in the study and 24.1% have been drunk at least once.

These population have been exposed to a school program (called *Unplugged*), based on behavioural theory, and especially designed by an expert group including behavioural scientists and public health evaluators (the EU-Dap IPG group). The *Unplugged* core program consists of 12 one-hour units delivered by teachers who attended three full days' standardised training course. The program targets both experimental and regular use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs through the development of basic life skills. The curriculum consists of three parts: the first aims to improve knowledge on risks of tobacco, alcohol and drug use, and on protective factors, as well as to build attitudes against drugs; the second focuses on interpersonal skills, beliefs, norms and realistic information about prevalence; the third aims to develop of intrapersonal skills, such as coping competences, problem solving/decision making and goal setting.

The program was offered in three formats: class curriculum alone, or class curriculum flanked by side activities involving either peers or parents (for more details www.eudap.net).

The programme was evaluated by submitting it to 3500 young students and the outcomes compared to those of 3500 controls submitted to the usual curriculum. The overall study enrolled 143 schools, 345 classes and involved 7079 students.

The allocation to intervention or control group was random, to allow rigorous evaluation.

The evaluation was done interviewing all the student before the intervention and repeating the interview ad the end of the scholar year, at least 3 months after the end of the intervention. The anonymous questionnaire collected frequency of use of tobacco, drugs and alcohol, and other information as well.

The results of the study have been presented during the conference in Lisbon, in the premises of the EMCDDA. After the intervention, the students involved in the intervention show a 26% lower probability to smoke daily (OR=0.74, IC95% 0.55-0.99), a 35% lower probability to ha frequent alcohol intoxications (OR=0.65, IC95% 0.46-0.92) and 23% lower probability to use cannabis (OR=0.77, IC95% 0.61-0.98). No differences exists between the three different programmes. All are equally effective compared to usual curricula.

“We are very pleased to have supported this evaluation because European Educational authorities need to have effective intervention to be proposed to schools” says dr Burkart, from the EMCDDA. “The results supported the evidence that this intervention can prevent a quarter of the use of drugs and tobacco and reduce the risk of the binge drinking” says prof Faggiano, from the Avogadro University, Italy, the coordinator of the project. “The participation of our centre to this European project starts from our long experience in health programmes against substance use in schools, and this was our contribution to EU-Dap”.