



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

Elias Allara¹, Fabrizio Faggiano^{1,2}, Zili Sloboda³, Romeo Brambilla², Peggy Stephens⁴, C. Hendricks Brown⁵, Ferdinand Keller⁶, Katherine Masyn⁷, Federica Vigna-Taglianti², Gregor Burkhardt⁸, Scott F. Grey⁴

¹ Department of Translational Medicine, Avogadro University, Novara, Italy ² Piedmont Centre for Drug Addiction Epidemiology, Grugliasco, Torino, Italy
³ JBS International, Inc., North Bethesda, MD, USA ⁴ College of Public Health, Kent State University, Kent, OH, USA ⁵ Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Miller School of Medicine, University of Miami, Miami, FL, USA ⁶ Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University Hospital, Ulm, Germany
⁷ Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Boston, MA, USA ⁸ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Lisboa, Portugal

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

- Four assessors evaluated materials and implementations using a pre-defined evaluation form.
- Prevalence rates of substance use in each study group were compared using chi-square tests.
- 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
Deliverers	Teachers	Trained police officers
Program delivering setting	In regular curriculum	Ad hoc lessons
Booster sessions	No	Yes
Interactivity (% of hours devoted to interactive work)	77.50	62.59
Main components (% of time devoted to cited skills)		
Knowledge	15.56	15.22
Refusal skill	7.38	8.72
Intentions	4.58	5.80
Risk perception	9.32	9.27
Normative beliefs	8.03	8.43
Expectations	6.04	8.04
Communications skills	10.04	7.75
Self-esteem and self-efficacy	6.56	1.95
Drug attitudes	4.77	6.27
Assertiveness	8.64	8.64
Problem solving	7.86	10.63
Decision making	7.50	8.45
Total of main components	96.25	99.18

Results

- Overall there were few differences between Unplugged and TCYL content. Class teachers delivered Unplugged and trained police officers delivered TCYL.
- U.S. control students had greater exposure to other prevention interventions.
- Baseline prevalence of alcohol and cannabis use was higher in the U.S. sample.
- Policies appeared to be more restrictive in the U.S for all substances.
- 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 ^a
Number of schools having conducted:			
any prevention activity ^b	14.7	71.4	<0.001
only other named interventions ^c	4.9	31.7	<0.001

^a Chi-square test.

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

^c 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.

Contacts

elias.allara@med.unipmn.it

Department of Translational Medicine,
Avogadro University, 28100 Novara, Italy