



Unplugged

European Union Drug
Addiction Prevention Trial Coordinating
Centre

Unplugged¹

Region	Global /MENA
Country	Several countries including Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, India (Bombay), Italy, Kuwait, Lebanon, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Spain, United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi), United Kingdom
Organization Name	European Union Drug Addiction Prevention Trial (EU-DAP) Coordinating Centre
Category	Unplugged
Start date	Health
End date	2002
Partners	Ongoing Institut fur Sozial und Gesundheitspsychologie, De Sleutel Institute, IFT-Nord / Institute for Therapy and Health Research, University Mental Health Research Institute, Piedmont Centre for Drug Addiction Epidemiology – OED, Edex / Community Resources Centre, Centre for Public Health – Tobacco Prevention (Sweden), Dep't. of Clinical and Experimental Medicine / Avogadro University, Dep't. of Internal Medicine and Public Health / University of L'Aquila, UNODC ROMENA, Mentor Arabia Mentor Foundation International, IKEA Social Initiative, UNODC Brazil, UNODC Nigeria, UNODC Pakistan, University College Ghent
UN involvement	Non-UN
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1. Background and description

Adolescence is a developmental stage when individuals are particularly vulnerable to engaging in risky behaviour such as drug use. In fact, according to modern models of substance abuse prevention, people who use tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs show a common tendency to develop dependency starting in adolescence.² Preventive interventions should therefore target age groups instead of specific substances.³

1 Inquiry form (July 2014); Interview (8 October 2014 and 25 February 2015); Write up (11 December 2014), Internal Validation (11 December- 12 December), Implementer Validation (10 February 2015); Final validation (October 2015).

2 McLellan 2000; Cami 2003.

3 Ashton 2003; Wise 1998; Nestler, 1997; Leshner 1997.



Primary prevention in schools is thought to be one of the most significant strategies for tackling substance use, because schools propose a systematic and efficient means to reach a large number of young persons.⁴ During the late 1980s, it became increasingly clear that school-based programmes which only conveyed information on the harm caused by drugs show limited, if any, effectiveness in modifying adolescents' behaviour, even when the programmes succeeded in increasing knowledge among youth. The prevailing theory was that knowledge of risks is not protective unless it is coupled with the ability to resist social influences, which can lead to substance use. Indeed, a recent Cochrane Review of school-based interventions to prevent drug use stated that only programmes based on enhancing social skills have some chance of being effective.⁶

Unplugged is a school-based drug prevention programme for adolescents. It aims to curb initiation of drug use and delay the transition from experimental to addicted behaviour involving alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other drugs.⁷ It is integrated in the school curriculum and the educational materials made available to students.

The programme uses a 'life skills' approach and provides key facts about alcohol, drugs and tobacco in addition to methods for problem solving and enhancing critical thinking, effective decision-making and communication and goal-setting skills. In addition to information and social or personal skills, the programme corrects misperceptions and focuses on normative beliefs (beliefs based on overestimated proportions of peers using drugs or approving drug use).

Organization profile⁸

The European Drug Addiction Prevention trial (EU-Dap) is a multicentre study implemented by nine partners from seven European countries. The EU-Dap project has been funded by the European Commission within the programme for the prevention of drug dependence since 2002. The project aims both to develop a theory-based school programme to prevent use of tobacco, drugs and alcohol, and to assess its effectiveness by mean of a rigorous experimental design. Known as Unplugged, the programme was developed by the EU-Dap Intervention Planning Group, and during the 2004-2005 school year was evaluated among 7,000, students aged 12-14 years. Details of the results, which were published in scientific literature, can be found on the project's website (www.eudap.net).



4 EU-Dap Final Technical Report n.2; UNICRI 2003.

5 Interview with Peer van der Kreeft, programme mentor and coordinator, 8 October 2014.

6 Faggiano, 2005.

7 EU-Dap Final Technical Report n.2.

8 EU-Dap website.

9 Unplugged factsheet.



2. Goal and objectives

2.1. Goal

Unplugged aims both to develop young people's knowledge, attitudes, awareness and skills and to address normative social influences on behaviour. It aims to develop human resource capacities for formulating, implementing and evaluating evidence-based work to prevent drug abuse and promote healthy behaviour work with young people through piloting school-based life-skills education.⁹

2.2. Objectives

The programme's short-term objective is to train teachers to implement the programme in schools by merging it into school curricula. Its long-term objective is to enhance the life skills of adolescents aged 12-14 years in schools and provide them with basic knowledge about alcohol, drugs and tobacco with the aim of prevention.¹⁰

3. Target group

3.1. Age group

The target age for this programme is students aged 12-14 years.¹¹ The target population for the evaluation consisted of students attending junior high school classes in the geographical areas corresponding to the centres involved in the programme.¹²

3.2. Gender considerations

The intervention reached out to both genders and there was no specific segregation. In the evaluation phase, approximately half of the participating students were male and half female.¹³

3.3. Ethnic / disability considerations

Any person can be enrolled in the Unplugged programme regardless of his or her background. No specific strategies were adopted for persons with disabilities.

3.4. Targeting the most marginalized / most at risk¹⁴

The programme did not restrict or exclude anyone. Assessments conducted by the implementers revealed that people from low

socioeconomic status have a high probability to engage in tobacco and drug use and to experience problematic alcohol use.¹⁵ In order to achieve a balanced representation of all socioeconomic levels of the population, an equal number of schools from low, middle and high socioeconomic areas were included in the effectiveness study. The analysis of the programme's efficacy according to socioeconomic status of the schools showed a better effect on pupils in the most disadvantaged schools, with an important potential effect on reduction of health-related inequalities.

3.5. Human rights programming

Unplugged is an evidence-based prevention programme that aims to protect adolescents in particular, and youth in general, from substance abuse by empowering them with the right life skills, norms and education and promoting their participation in all areas of prevention.¹⁵

3.6. Youth involvement

Youth were involved in the programme as beneficiaries and in the evaluation. The Unplugged approach is to focus on

¹⁰ Interview with Peer Van Der Kreeft, programme mentor and coordinator, 8 October 2014.

¹¹ EU-Dap Final Technical Report n.2.

¹² EU-Dap Final Technical Report n.2.

¹³ Faggiano et al 2007.

¹⁴ Caria et al, 2011.

¹⁵ Ibid.



interactive learning through the active involvement of and consultation with the young people participating in the programme. Children are also consulted to ascertain their views and feedback on the programme as part of the evaluation, which in turn feeds into the refinement and development of the work.¹⁶

4. Strategy and Implementation

4.1. Strategies / theoretical approaches / methodologies

The main theories on which the programme is based are: social learning; problem behaviour; the health belief model; the theory of reasoned action-attitude; and social norms theory. The theories are integrated and intertwined, creating a complex model which allowed Unplugged to be included among programmes using a 'comprehensive social influence' approach and combined 'social competence and social influence' curricula. The development of the intervention was based on previous experience from other evidence-based programmes by referring to a meta-analysis done by Nancy Tobler¹⁷ which examines different school-based drug prevention programmes.

Unplugged targets both experimental and regular use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs. The curriculum consists of three parts: the first aims to improve knowledge of risks and protective factors, as well as to build attitudes against substance use; the second focuses on interpersonal skills, beliefs, norms and realistic information about prevalence; and the third aims to develop intrapersonal skills such as coping competences, problem-solving, decision-making and setting goals.

4.2. Activities

The Unplugged curriculum consists of 12 one-hour lessons, administered by school teachers who have been trained in a 2.5 day training session. The 12 lessons are:¹⁸

1. Opening Unplugged;
2. To be or not to be in a group;
3. Choices – Alcohol, Risk and Protection;
4. Your beliefs, norms and information – do they reflect reality?;
5. Smoking the cigarette drug – Inform yourself;
6. Express yourself;
7. Get up, stand up;
8. Party tiger;
9. Drugs - Get informed;
10. Coping competencies;
11. Problem-solving and decision-making;
12. Goal setting.

The programme is offered in combination with three seminars for parents¹⁹ to inform them about the programme and to raise their awareness of their role in support of the initiative.

Initially, Unplugged operated in seven selected centres across Europe. Currently any stakeholder (universities, research centres, schools, ministries, etc.) in a country can request to have Unplugged adapted and implemented. The adaptation of the programme differs from one setting to another.

4.3. Innovativeness

The programme is innovative because its resources are offered free of copyright. Resources are available without cost to those

16 Interview with Peer Van Der Kreeft, programme mentor and coordinator, 8 October 2014.

17 Tobler NS, Roona MR, Ochshorn PM, Diana G, Streke AV, Stackpole KM (1998).

18 EU-Dap website.

19 EU-Dap website.





who express interest in implementing the programme. A distinctive core component of this programme is that teachers deliver the sessions instead of external trainers or educational and/or drug education experts. Teachers have clear instructions to follow step by step in delivering the sessions in a participatory manner, relying on group work. The programme does not tackle refusal skills and attitudes toward drugs explicitly but rather relies on normative belief and building life skills which enable youth enrolled in the programme to experience change on their own (e.g., decrease in positive attitudes towards drugs).

4.4. Cost and funding²⁰

The running cost of the Unplugged programme is 200 euros for all sessions delivered to a cohort of 30 pupils. However, if organizations or institutions in countries want to adapt it, an estimate cost of between 100,000 and 300,000 euros is needed for the adaptation process only. This cost encompasses the cost of training-of-trainers sessions delivered by EU-Dap and other international experts to local trainers who in turn train the teachers, and the cost of translation of all relevant material. The adaptation cost does not include material. Adaptation further includes a pre-pilot with a process evaluation study as a resource for adaptation of materials and training.

4.5. Sustainability²¹

The sustainability of Unplugged is based on the cascade model. When organizations, institutions or government bodies in countries express their willingness to implement Unplugged, a team of EU-Dap experts and international experts train local

trainers who in turn train the teachers in schools to deliver the sessions. Through this mechanism, many individuals are being trained on how to implement the programme which entails a bigger reach. Teachers are trained once yet they can continue to implement Unplugged on their own for up to 7-8 years with occasional refresher courses by local trainers to keep them updated.

4.6. Replicability

Unplugged was originally developed by the EU-Dap project and evaluated positively in seven European countries. In addition, the Mentor Foundation implemented the project in five other European countries (Croatia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Romania and Russian Federation) with the support of the IKEA Social Initiative. Mentor Arabia and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime adapted the material and are currently working on implementing the project in six Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco and United Arab Emirates).²²

5. Evaluation of effectiveness

EU-Dap conducted an evaluation of Unplugged to assess the effectiveness of the programme.²³ The source population consisted of students attending junior high school classes in the geographical areas corresponding to the centres involved in the study.

The programme was evaluated through a cluster randomized controlled trials conducted in seven countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden) in which 143 schools were randomly allocated to intervention (Unplugged) and

20 Interview with Peer Van Der Kreeft, program mentor and coordinator, 25 February 2015.

21 Ibid.

22 Interview with Peer Van Der Kreeft, programme mentor and coordinator, 8 October 2014.

23 EU-Dap Final Technical Report n.2.





control (usual curriculum) groups. In all participating classes, pre- and post-test questionnaires were carried out before and after the intervention and one year after the end of the intervention.²⁴

The questionnaire was self-completed and included questions on: (1) own substance use; (2) knowledge and opinions about substances; (3) substance use in the close environment; (4) family and social environment; (5) school environment and climate; and (6) problems and skills.

The results of post-test evaluation (three months after the end of the programme) showed that Unplugged was effective in reducing sporadic and frequent episodes of drunkenness in the past 30 days by 28 and 31 per cent respectively, and use of cannabis by 23 per cent.²⁵ The curriculum was successful in preventing baseline non-smokers or sporadic smokers from moving onto daily smoking, but in line with its preventive profile, was not effective in helping baseline daily smokers to reduce or stop smoking.²⁶

Results of the one year follow-up evaluation showed persisting beneficial effects of the programme for sporadic and frequent episodes of drunkenness and for frequent cannabis use in the past 30 days, although daily cigarette smoking was not affected by the programme as it had been at the short-term follow-up; initiation of daily smoking was postponed by a year.

6. Strengths and opportunities²⁷

- The material is openly available for interested stakeholders.
- The teachers are given clear instructions to follow, which ensures a participatory approach in classes and does not make

teachers feel uncomfortable to rely on group work instead of lecturing.

- Messages tackle other addictive substances such as cigarettes and alcohol and are tailored in an implicit way which talks to pupils.
- It is evidence based and a randomized control trial is included in the evaluation methodology.

7. Challenges²⁸

- There is a risk of having teachers deliver a message which is not appropriate to the age group of pupils, for example by mentioning ‘sniffing’ to pupils who might not even know about this practice and its magnitude. To address this challenge, the guide given to teachers clearly explains the messages that can be given at different ages.
- Sensitive issues sometimes arise in the adaptation process. For example, in the adaptation of the Arabic version of the programme, implementers were concerned about mixing genders in the school. In the Russian Federation, the issue of sensitive language was very important; for example, a question like “why do people smoke?” was considered sensitive.
- Many stakeholders who express interest in the programme secure funding for the adaptation process but do not take into account the running costs, and funding thus sometimes expires before this stage, which hinders the long-term dissemination of the programme.

24 EU-Dap Final Technical Report n.2; UNICRI 2003.

25 EU-Dap Final Technical Report n.2.

26 Faggiano et al 2008.

27 Interview with Peer Van Der Kreeft, programme mentor and coordinator, 25 February 2015.

28 Ibid.



- In some countries, conducting a randomized control trial was challenging.

8. Next steps and the way forward²⁹

Several countries are looking forward to implementing Unplugged, which would expand its reach. Process evaluation reports from countries implementing the programme so far reveal positive outcomes and many have expressed interest in having a randomized control trial.

9. Lessons learned and recommendations³⁰

- The running cost of the programme should be taken into account when planning the budget, especially in that it ensures the long-term dissemination of the programme.
- A randomized control trial should be planned, based on the setting and if funding is secured. For example in some countries (Brazil, Nigeria, Pakistan, United Kingdom) it was decided that phase 1 of the adaptation would be a pilot without the randomized control trial component and phase 2 would include the trial.
- The Unplugged methodology can be used to tackle other topics such as violence and bullying, and the team from EU-DAP can offer support to do so.
- Having evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of an intervention would



ensure its endorsement by policymakers and stakeholders and facilitate its implementation at a national level.

10. Components to consider for scale-up in MENA

- A curriculum tested for effectiveness with a structured manual;
- The evaluation methodology including the randomized control trial.

11. Resources

The Intervention Manual is published is freely available in the EU-DAP website (http://www.eudap.net/Unplugged_HomePage.aspx).

EU -Dap Technical Report n.1 and EU-Dap Technical Report n.2

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²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

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