

## PREVENTION OF THE USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AMONG 5TH TO 7TH GRADERS

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*The purpose of the study is to outline the trends in the use of legal drugs among students from the 5th to the 7th grades and to pinpoint the problematic aspects and measures for implementation of a school-based program for prevention of the use of psychoactive substances. The subject of the study is the dependence between risk factors and prevention factors with regard to the use of drugs among students in the context of development of a school-based program for prevention of the use of psychoactive substances. The study was conducted by means of questionnaires in 2010/2011 among 1161 students from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade from ten schools on the territory of the city of Varna. The following were adopted as indicators of the evaluation of the use of tobacco and alcohol. The risk factors and the preventive factors related to the role of the family and the friends, the individual and personal characteristics of the students and the pedagogical aspects of the implementation of a school-based program for prevention of the use of psychoactive substances. The initial introduction of the school-based program for prevention of the use of psychoactive substances must anticipate the transformation of incidental use into regular use. A model of school-based program to prevent drug use is presented. The program builds on an on-going three-year prevention among teenagers from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade in three schools in Varna. It is run by a team of teachers/experts and young volunteers. The structure and the aspects of the program are presented.*

**Keywords:** health education, school-based prevention of drug use, risk factors, protective factors

The surveys during the last two decades have been directed to the detection of dependencies and models, which describe how drug abuse starts and progresses. A lot of factors can be connected with the risk for a person to abuse psychoactive substances. The common risk of use and addiction is affected by the individual characteristics, the social environment - family, school, coevals, community in the district they live in, the media (Hartzler & Fromme, 2003; Davis & Spillman, 2011). The risk for psycho active substances abuse includes the relation between the number and the kind of the risk factors. Researchers found that adolescents, among which can be observed a fast increase of drug abuse, have a high level of risk factors and a low level of protective factors (Wills, McNamara, Vaccaro & Hirky, 1996:167).

Prevention programs are supposed to reinforce the protective factors and to be directed to decreasing the risk factors for psycho active substances abuse (Hawkins, Catalano & Arthur, 2002:27). Risk and protective factors affect people from all groups but they can have different effect according to person's age, gender, ethnic affiliation, cultural background, social and natural environment (Moon, Hecht, Jackson & Spellers, 1999; Oetting, Edwards, Kelly & Beauvais, 1997).

The interaction with students, in a way acknowledging their values and personal experience, creates the opportunity of meaningful students' contribution, connected with the programs for drug abuse prevention. Pupils react positively, when their individual needs and their attitude to psycho active substances (regardless of the fact if they take or do not take drugs) are acknowledged. Then the channels of communication are open, without tolerating the use of psychoactive substances.

In order to be more effective prevention programs have to consider the use of all kinds of drugs, separately and in combination, including the use of legal drugs (cigarettes and alcohol) from minors, the use of illegal drugs (e.g. marihuana and heroin), and inappropriate use of legally obtained substance (e.g. inhalants, drugs and steroids) (Botvin, Griffin, Paul & Macaulay, 2003:18). They have to be directed to the kind of problematic drug abuse in the community (Hawkins, Catalano & Arthur, 2002:17).

A certain dynamics in the main indexes of the usage of narcotics (drugs) in Bulgaria can be observed in the recent years. This fact corresponds with the general tendencies in the EU but some specific trends have been reported. A tendency of keeping the level of illegal drugs usage and reducing the usage of legal drugs such as tobacco is registered according to the annual reports of European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA, 2012). It comes as a result of the WHO (World Health Organization) strategy for restricting smoking and creating prevention programs. Some national and regional surveys show an increasing number of children and students who use and abuse psycho active substances (Apostolov, Todorov, Zhekova & Kostova, 2009:17). The starting age has dropped disturbingly (Dimitrov, 2011:23; Boneva & Kolev, 2011:796).

M. Eisen registers, that it is necessary the potential effect of the specific risk and protective factors during the different ages to be reported in planning of the school syllabus (Eisen, Zellman & Murray, 2003:886).

In a longitudinal survey N. N. Ialongo and J. Poduska ascertain that the early intervention frequently has bigger influence than the subsequent one. It happens through the change of the child's road of life, moving away from the problems and directing to positive behavior (Ialongo, Poduska, Werthamer & Kellam, 200:159).

## The research methodology

*The subject of the study:* To be established the dependency between risk factors and protective factors with regard to the use of tobacco and alcohol among students from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> grades in the context of development of a school-based program for prevention of the use of psychoactive substances in 2010/2011 we implemented a survey including 1161 students from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade from ten schools on the territory of the city of Varna.

*The purpose* of the study is to outline the trends in the use of tobacco and alcohol among students from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> grades and to pinpoint the

problematic aspects and measures for implementation of a school-based program for prevention of the use of psychoactive substances.

*Method:* The study was conducted by means of questionnaires. The following were adopted as indicators of the evaluation of the use of tobacco and alcohol: frequency of usage; age of first attempts to use; usage pattern; gender-based differentiation. The risk factors and the preventive factors related to the role of the family and the friends, the individual and personal characteristics of the students and the pedagogical aspects of the implementation of a school-based program for prevention of the use of psychoactive substances. The evaluation was accomplished with the help of five-point Likert item. As a result of the survey three groups of students were differentiated: students that do not use psychoactive substances, students with incidental use – 2-3 times a month, students with regular use – 1-2 times a week.

## Results

Situation of the use of alcohol and tobacco products among students. Frequency of the use of tobacco, age of the first attempts to use, usage patterns

A transition from incidental to regular smoking is observed in the period from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The incidental use becomes regular from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. In the 7<sup>th</sup> grade the percentage of incidental smokers and regular smokers increases considerably compared to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. One in every ten fifth graders smokes incidentally. In sixth grade 4.7% make a transition to regular smoking and the trend for incidental use stays the same (9.1%). In seventh grade one third of the students smoke, the number of those who smoke steadily doubles – 8.8%, and the incidental use increases to 16.8 % (Table 1).

Table 1. *Use of tobacco by students in grades (in %)*

Use of tobacco	Meaning	Grades			
		5th	6th	7th	Total
Incidental use	N	33	42	65	140
	% of tobacco users	23.6	30.0	46.4	100
	% from the grades	10.6	9.1	16.8	12.1
	% of all	2.8	3.6	5.6	12.1
Regular use	N	0	22	34	56
	% of tobacco users	0.0	39.3	60.7	100
	% from the grades	0.0	4.7	8.8	4.8
	% of all	0.0	1.9	2.9	4.8
Do not smoke	N	278	400	287	965
	% of tobacco users	28.8	41.5	29.7	100
	% from the grades	89.4	86.2	74.4	83.1
	% of all	23.9	34.5	24.7	83.1
Total	N	311	464	386	1161
	% of all	26.8	40.0	33.2	100

Approximately two thirds (60.7%) from the group of regular smokers are seventh graders, and 39.3% are sixth graders.

The experimental smokers within the age range 8-10 tend to become incidental smokers at a later period. If the first attempts were made at the beginning of primary school there is a higher probability of regular use at a

later stage. The average age in which the first attempts for smoking are made is 8-12 age – AV = 10.27, SD = 2.30, and the first cigarette for a considerable number of the researched students is in the period 9-12 age - AV = 10.98, SD = 1.93 (Table 2).

Table 2. Average age of initial use of tobacco

Average age of initial use of tobacco from the students						
Meaning	Av	SD	M	Mo	Min	Max
Attempted the first cigarette	10.27	2.30	11	12	4	14
Smoked the first cigarette	10.98	1.33	11	12	5	14

One third of the students smoked their first cigarette at this age. They say they smoke 1-2 times a month or several times a year and 19% of the students smoke regularly. In tree quarters of the last group the attempts are made after the age of 11 (Table 2).

It can be assumed that in this period the attempts for smoking are provoked by curiosity and wish for experimenting and probably are made in the family or with friends. These types of environment are protective regarding abstention from usage. In the transition from elementary school age in fifth grade the context of emotional, cognitive and social elements changes. Probably there is a preponderance of the influence of factors, which are steady for a longer period of time and support the need of smoking.

The use of tobacco occurs most frequently when friends get together – 70.8%. It leads us to the assumption that in the pattern of smoking in this period the dominant motives are experimenting and the wish for being part of the small (friendly) group. It is supported by the data that this situation is typical for the half of incidental smokers. In a broader social context – at a party at a peer’s home – the percentage of smokers decreases – 42.2%.

The use of tobacco when the student is alone – 17.5% and when at a disco – 13% - is related to the pattern of regular smoking. Probably, the perception of the smoking as a fashionable behavior, showing independence and attraction, typical for the older students is not confirmed.

There is not a substantial difference between the gender and smoking in this period:

- 4.4% of the girls and 5.3% of the boys smoke regularly;
- 12% of the girls and 12.2% if the boys smoke incidentally;
- 82.5% of the boys do not smoke, opposed to 83% of the girls.

Cramer’s coefficient of association is low (Cramer's V=0.023 with p=0.004). These grade levels are still dominated by students who are non-smokers. The preventive activity supporting the non-smoking pattern should anticipate and delay in time the regular use.

### Use of alcohol, age of first attempts, patterns of use

In the period from the 5th to the 7th grade the group of students who do not use alcohol decreases with each higher grade. In the 5th grade two thirds of the students (62.5%) say that they do not use alcohol, in 6th grade – 46.3%, while in 7th grade these student are one third – 29% (Table 3).

Table 3. *Alcohol use by the students in grades*

Use of alcohol	Meaning	Grades			
		5th	6th	7th	Total
Incidental use	N	104	225	227	556
	% of alcohol users	18.70	40.50	40.80	100
	% from the grades	33.40	48.50	58.80	47.90
	% of all	9.00	19.40	19.60	47.90
Regular use	N	12	24	45	81
	% of alcohol users	14.80	29.60	55.60	100
	% from the grades	3.90	5.20	11.70	7.00
	% of all	1.00	2.10	3.90	7.00
Do not drink alcohol	N	195	215	114	524
	% of alcohol users	37.20	41.00	21.80	100
	% from the grades	62.70	46.30	29.50	45.10
	% of all	16.80	18.50	9.80	45.10
Total	N	311	464	386	1161
	% of all	26.80	40.00	33.20	100

No substantial dependence was observed between the age of the first attempts to use alcohol and the intensity of drinking

Unlike smoking the period from 8 to 10 years of age is most frequently pointed out as the time when the first attempts to use alcohol began both by incidental and by regular drinkers. When the use is regular the first attempts (in 47%) and the first glass of alcohol (in 48.5%) is at the age 8-10 (Table 4).

Table 4. *Average age of alcohol use by the students*

Average age of primary use of alcohol by the students						
Meaning	Av	SD	M	Mo	Min	Max
Tried alcohol for the first time	9.14	2.59	9	10	4	14
Drank the first glass of alcohol	10.07	2.35	10	11	5	14

Alcohol is most frequently used at parties or when getting together with friends. Considerably lower is the percentage of use at discos or when students are alone.

Incidental use is in larger scale in fifth and sixth grade and is frequently related to sipping alcohol drink in different celebrations in friendly environment. The influence of gender as a determining factor on the intensity of drinking is unsubstantial.

### Joint use of tobacco and alcohol

There is a slight interdependence between the use of tobacco and the use of alcohol in that period. Students who smoke were found to be more likely to use alcohol. Students who were offered tobacco were also offered alcohol. In half of the cases the proposal to use alcohol was not accompanied by a proposal to smoke.

### Risk factors and prevention factors regarding the use of psychoactive substances. Impact of the family environment

Half of the students' parents smoke – 49.9% of the fathers and 47.6% of the mothers. When the mother or a sibling in the family smokes this promotes the use of tobacco by students. The value of Student's criterion shows that the difference was significant –  $t=3.01$  when  $t_p=2.58$  ( $p<0.01$ );  $t=2.949$  when  $t_p=2.580$  ( $p<0.01$ ).

There is not a significant difference in the use of tobacco from the father of the family. In the different groups the use is respectively 57.53% of the fathers of the students with regular smoking, 58.7% of the fathers of those with incidental use and 47.7% of the group of non-smokers. Dependence is observed between passive smoking and intensity of smoking.

In 62.5% of the students with regular use and in 46.4% of the students with incidental use their parents smoke in the same room where their child is, in the same time it is found only in one third of the students, who do not smoke.

All studied students reported their family life as predominantly calm and normal. The lower support to the child in the family is related to incidental use in 5th grade level.

There is a trend, in which the students in fifth grade characterize their family life as “Unsafe, with problems, which they overcome” or “It is rather unsafe”. It can be assumed that it is connected with certain difficulties of the child with the social adaptation and the achievements at school in the period of transition from primary to secondary level and the parents' approach for their overcoming.

### Impact of friends

There is a high level of dependence between those who have a friend who smokes and the intensity of smoking. 43.3% of the friends of the regular smokers also smoke regularly, 33.3% - occasionally, and 23.3% do not smoke. Among the friends of the students who do not smoke 8% smoke regularly, 13.4% occasionally, and a considerable part (78.6%) do not smoke.

Friendship is considered a highly praised value by all studied groups. According to the observed trend the circle of friends is perceived as having supporting role by most of the incidental smokers compared to the group of non-smokers.

When a friend smokes it is considered to have strong influence on the choice to use tobacco in case an offer is made, Student's criterion shows that  $t=15.29$  when  $t_p=3.30$  ( $p<0.001$ ).

### Personal characteristics of the students. Awareness of the use of alcoholic and tobacco products and their impact on health

The awareness of the risks resulting from the use of psychoactive substances is important preventing factor for a considerable number of the students. Half of those surveyed (52.1%) reported that they are well informed of the risks resulting from the use of alcohol and tobacco but for a small number of the regular smokers among students (23.3%) this information is not sufficient.

The family and the Internet are pointed out as leading sources of information. One fourth of the participants in the study receive a

considerable portion of information at school, mainly in the class hour, from the media and from personal observations.

It is worth noting that the circle of friends is not evaluated as a reliable source of information by those who do not use tobacco and alcohol. The answers show that it has greater impact on the users.

*Values, interests, needs.* The family, the healthy lifestyle and the education are considered as most important by all studied groups.

Friendship and personal freedom are highly evaluated but there are differences showing that a greater percentage of the users attribute lower value to these aspects of life. Love, money and entertainment are more important for the group of users. Art and sports are more valued by the group of non-users of psychoactive substances (Table 5).

Table 5. *Degree of importance of the aspects of life of the students that use or do not use drugs*

Degree of importance of the aspects of life					
Aspects of the life	Groups	Av	SD	F	Sig.
Family	Regular use	4.74	0.768	4.418	0.012
	Do not use	4.91	0.412		
Education	Regular use	4.58	0.656	7.165	0.001
	Do not use	4.73	0.605		
Money	Regular use	4.00	0.858	8.740	0.000
	Do not use	3.56	1.076		
Friends	Regular use	4.61	0.746	7.117	0.001
	Do not use	4.48	0.784		
Health	Regular use	4.75	0.691	1.913	0.148
	Do not use	4.87	0.470		
Love	Regular use	4.04	1.044	3.802	0.023
	Do not use	3.88	1.173		
Sport	Regular use	3.99	1.082	0.305	0.737
	Do not use	4.03	1.084		
Personal freedom	Regular use	4.36	0.945	3.798	0.023
	Do not use	4.30	0.895		
Art	Regular use	3.19	1.101	2.723	0.066
	Do not use	3.48	1.180		
Public recognition	Regular use	3.71	1.050	1.256	0.285
	Do not use	3.83	1.065		
Entertainment	Regular use	4.31	0.977	4.191	0.015
	Do not use	4.05	1.009		

Information by itself is not a substantially important regulating factor. 75% of those who would light up a cigarette if offered by a friend stated that they were very well informed, 18.8% – partially informed and for 6.2% the information was not sufficient. When a friend smokes this tends to have strong impact on the choice to use tobacco when offered.

Passive smoking of the child in the family is connected with the pattern of lower self-control when an offer is made by a friend – 54.4% of the parents of those children smoke in the same room ( $t=4.85$ ,  $tp=3.33$  ( $p<0.001$ )).

## Discussion

1. A transition from incidental to regular use of tobacco and alcohol is observed in the period from the 5th to the 7th grade.

- ❖ A specific difference in the pattern of use of the two psychoactive substances is established in that period. Smoking has more significant impact in the process of identification of adolescents with the world of adults and the realization of the pattern among friends. The consumption of alcohol is related more significantly to the need of entertainment and diversification of communication.
- ❖ No difference was found in the use of tobacco by girls and boys during the studied period however data from national and international studies indicate that the share of smoking girls will be growing over the next years (Apostolov, Todorov, Zhekova & Kostova, 2009:14). One of the reasons is the proven higher psycho-physiological vulnerability of girls to the effects of psychoactive substances. This necessitates consideration of the specific preventive activities among girls.
- ❖ Despite the fact that one third of seventh graders smoke, a big share of the students at that age do not use tobacco. The preventive actions supporting the model of non-use should anticipate and delay the regular use.

2. The considered age group is a transitional period from childhood to adolescence. Its beginning is related to the still significant impact of the family environment and the gradual transition to the predominance of the influence of peers and friends. The relation and the significance of the risk factors and the preventing factors with regard to the use of psychoactive substance changes in that period.

- The family influences the use at the beginning of the period both in a perceptive and an emotional aspect and as a behavioral model. It is pointed as a preferred source of information regarding the risks of the use of psychoactive substance. The lower support provided by the parents to the child is related to incidental use of alcohol during the transition from primary to basic education. Important risk factors are the passive smoking of the child and the smoking of the mother or a sibling in the family.
- There is high dependence between the use of tobacco and alcohol by a friend and the intensity of use. A process of formation of social standards that allow and support the use is observed however, at this stage, the school community still tolerates the incidental use and the consumption is for demonstration purposes. This is confirmed by the fact that more incidental users tend to consider the circle of friends as supportive compared to the group of users and non-users.
- The knowledge of the risks and impact of psychoactive substances have regulating effect if they are incorporated as an element in a system of values and behavioral models that support the non-use model. The information has significance in the period before the incidental use transforms into regular use.
- As risk factors for the use of psychoactive substances can be pointed the higher significance attributed to entertainment and the easy and pleasant spending of the free time, the earlier sexual development, the demonstration or compensation of material welfare. The lower evaluation of friendship and personal freedom are indicators of problems in communication and selfperception that are compensated for by the use of tobacco and alcohol. The patterns of use of tobacco

and alcohol by adults and peer create a risk of poor self-control and low criticism of the personal or another's use.

The prevalence of drug use in the country and the potential dangers of using drugs makes tobacco, alcohol, and other drug education an important component of comprehensive school health education.

Educational programs for psycho active substances abuse prevention in the schools can be defined as teaching programs, operation policies, procedures and other practices, which contribute for the achievement of broader health goals for drug use and abuse prevention. The education for drug abuse prevention includes not only official, but also additional school syllabuses, creating safe and healthy social environment, providing appropriate health services and help, and binding the family and the community with the planning and realizing of the programs (Popov, 2002:57; Kuliana & Goodman, 1994:12).

Prevention programs in schools, which are in combination with two or more programs such as family and public-based programs, can be more effective than an only program (Spath, Redmond, Trudeau & Shin, 2002:21). Public programs, which include media campaigns and introduction of new regulations for restricting the access of alcohol, cigarettes and other drugs, are more effective if they are accompanied with school and family interventions (Hawkins, Catalano & Arthur, 2002:9). This suggests interaction and cooperation between different institution, the family and civil organizations for planning and realizing the prevention.

### School-based program about prevention of the use of psycho active substances

The object of the following analysis is the development and the structure of the school-based program for psycho active substances abuse prevention among the students from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grades, realized in the period 2006-2012.

The program builds on an on-going three-year prevention among teenagers in three big Varna schools, sponsored by the Municipal Centre for Drug prevention in Varna and preceded by a year voluntary work in two community based youth Health4US clubs.

An introduction of "Universal structural program about prevention of the use of psycho active substances, based in schools (5<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> grades)" was planned in accordance to the identified problems and needs, and the accepted normative documents on national and European level. They were connected with "A strategy of the municipality of Varna for prevention of the use of psycho active substances".

The pilot program was realized in the period 2006-2008 in special lessons designed for solving the problems of the class and discussing important issues. It covered three schools in the area of Varna. The project is closely integrated to the school system and the classes on prevention are agreed upon with the schools' staff. That means that the target group – 5<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> grade children is closely embedded in the project organisation. The program fills a gap in the school curriculum as there are no regular classes on drug prevention in this age group.

In the period 2009-2012 teacher training was included in the program. The program was accomplished with the guidance of the teachers in special lessons of the class. In this period 784 students from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grade were included. 33 teachers and counselors from the three schools were involved in

the training about the development of the professional competence in the program related work.

*The main goal of the program* was the decrease of the number of students using psycho active substances through realizing primary prevention in 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade, directed to the consumption and alcohol, tobacco products and illegal drugs abuse.

The program aims to empower young people from an early age with a set of life skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to combat health threats. Raising awareness on the complexity of tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse through lessons, seminars, peer counselling, drama, painting strategy games and creative outdoor workshops the program boosts teens' self-confidence and encourages them to step off the track to unhealthy lifestyle.

It aims at continual involvement of youth and the community – parents, teachers, authorities in series of friendly Drug-Free events providing a positive atmosphere of intergenerational tolerance.

*The structure and the content of the program* were differentiated in the following modules:

- *Module*: Education of students - that includes: „Sweep the „weed” out of the gate! – educational program; Health matters! – outdoor leisure time activities.
- *Module*: „Peer to peer” training
- *Module* : Teacher training
- *Module* : Work with parents
- *Module* : Cooperation with the community

#### Module: Student training according to the program

*Main goal*: Providing information, formation of positive and responsible attitude to the personal health, improvement of the social skills to manage with risk situations, training to control and manage emotions, consideration of strategies to develop the abilities, the capacities, the interests and the beneficial organization of the free time. The program was realized in two directions: introducing the topics, connected with the prevention of the use of psycho active substances in special lessons of the class five hours in the school year and in extra-curricular activities in students' free time.

*Thematic field*: Central to drug education is provision of age-appropriate information about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs on the body, factors associated with dependency, and legal aspects of drug use.

In fifth grade the introduced topics are: “Origin and spreading of tobacco and alcohol”, “Forms of usage”, “Myths and facts”, “Reasons for their use”, “Consequences of their use.”, “What makes children try alcohol and smoking?”, “Evaluation of the information”, “Decisions I make”.

In the sixth grade the teachers draw students' attention to the topics: “Structure and characteristics of tobacco and alcohol”, “Impact on the health”, “Temporary and long-lasting effects”, “Passive smoking”, “Psycho active substances and society”, “Advertising and anty-advertising”.

In the seventh grade they discussed the topics, connected with: “Dependency from the use of tobacco and alcohol”, “Forms of dependencies”, “Illegal drugs”, “Kinds of drugs”, “Myths and facts”, “Risks for the health”, “Temporary and long-lasting effects”, ‘Youth subcultures and drugs”, “Drugs and society”, “Evaluation of the information”. The effects of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs on pregnant women and their children also are addressed, together with the social effects of their use and the relation of alcohol and drug use to suicide, violence, and other health and safety issues.

The program was realized through methods and forms, which directed the students to active cognitive activity and communication: lectures; discussions; work in small groups; cases solving; brainstorming; role plays; work with electronic sources of information; making posters, collages and comics; presentations; carrying out inquiries and interviews with adults and peers; observations and experiments; competitions.

In addition, the program includes lessons and intraactivities that enhance students' communication, self-esteem, decision-making and responsible self-management skills.

Tobacco, alcohol and drug education also offers many opportunities to infuse content into other curricular areas - language, arts, science, math, social studies, sport and outdoor leisure time activities.

Each school year there is a contest on best NO DRUGS! poster, comics, installation, photo session, graffiti. The materials are exhibited in the schools and in public places.

Computer gamers' thrill is mobilised towards health-promotion in the computer lessons where teens explore pre-screened drug prevention portals and play online interactive games, send e-cards with facts on tobacco and drug abuse to relatives and friends.

The format of activities is based on popular TV and media formulas as game and quiz shows, board games and online resources that are familiar, friendly and exciting to explore.

Children's passion for games is a strong motivator to participate in these health focussed workshops WWW ? DRUGS. OVER game set. The idea, developed in a partnership with "Club of Knowledge – Varna", is based on a widely popular Russian quiz game "What? Where ? When ?" shortly "WWW ? DRUGS". Three teams of the project schools meet at a spinning round table with 12 sectors/ questions /problem cases on drug prevention devised by the audience.

Workshops in environmental, are led by scouts or by volunteer teenagers – based on popular TV shows e.g. "Survivor" but with missions on health safety, recognition of risk factors and techniques for avoiding risk. In this way the prevention workshops are both competitive and informative, team friendly and personal and able to be enjoyed by kids of that age.

### Module: Student training using the approach "Coevals teach their coevals"

*Main goal:* Active involvement of peers in the process of prevention and creation of conditions for more efficient communication and formation of knowledge and skills through the „Peer to peer” approach.

*Performance* of secondary prevention aimed at students at risk that includes provision of information and training.

Participation of coevals as mediators in the realization of the program had a great importance, since they were mediators in the process of rationalization of the problems from the point of view of their age characteristics. All of the activities were planned in correspondence with their specific needs, examined in preliminary surveys.

Student volunteers and university students who are trained as peer educators and mediators for conflict solving, lead the workshops at schools, facilitate the game shows, survey intergenerational attitudes on drug abuse and prevention.

Through the use of interactive methods the participants did a training based on the topics of the program. In the working process they developed

common social skills and skills of self-management: effective communication, team work, decision taking, and stress management, forming of pro-social skills, contacts and friendly relations. The participants learned how to identify different types of manipulative influence and acquired strategies for counteraction and rejection.

They developed skills how to introduce the program in front of their peers and to search for information about the prevention of psychoactive substances abuse.

Special attention is paid to the involvement of children with anti-social behaviour and indications for drug abuse who are also trained as volunteers. They are encouraged to integrate within creative workshops – graffiti and poster painting, drama and eco-camping which help them open up and be interested in further volunteer informative activities.

#### Module: Teacher training for putting the program into practice

*Main goal:* Improvement of teachers' professional competence to present information, use of interactive methods, and use of resources and methods to evaluate the students' needs related to the use of psychoactive substances.

*Thematic field:* The training helps the teachers to orientate in the structure and technology for application of the program and to follow the main principles for realizing it. It also allows them to use variety of strategies for learning and selection of information, resources and techniques for evaluation, appropriate for the needs of the student.

Preparation of the teachers is of essential importance, not only for mastering strategies for drug use prevention, but also for realizing the cross-curricular and inner links, and for highlighting in what extend the topics about the forming of health culture and social skills correspond to the syllabus of different grades.

There is a considerable amount of evidence about the fact that teacher training is as important as the choice of the "right" program for securing its success. Teacher training reinforces the influence and the duration of the program for drug abuse prevention.

*Module: Work with parents* in accordance to the program connected with the prevention of the use of psycho active substances. *Main goal:* Widening parents' knowledge about the psycho active substances and forming skills of communication with the adolescents about drug related topics.

*Thematic field:* Introducing information about the types of narcotic substances. Dynamics of the usage of alcohol and tobacco products during the childhood and the adolescence Hazardous and protective factors connected with their usage.

Including the parents in the stage of planning the prevention related program helped the more accurate assessment of the needs, its planning and realization. Parents' opinion can not only support, but also reverse the messages which the programs about prevention of psycho active substances abuse send to the students. Parents' attitude contributes to formation of social standards regarding drug use and social support of training about prevention.

Information about drugs, which was introduced in the presence of the students and parents' training, reinforced the knowledge, which the children acquired about the damaging effects of their use and created opportunities for family discussions about abuse with legal and illegal substances.

Teachers discussed different strategies with the parents. This gave them directions how they could help with the problems, connected with the use of psycho active substances, such as- modeling of responsible use of alcohol

and tobacco products in the family, discussing the topic about drug use from the children, setting clear family rules, regarding the use of psycho active substances, introducing the requirements about giving first aid and rendering their support in the attempts of adolescents to give up drug use.

The interaction with the family was realized in the form of informative sessions with the parents, taking part in discussions with the students, quizzes, contests and competitions, participating in the development of school projects or in activities, connected with promotion of health. A common practice in the schools was the preparation of brochures with answers of the most frequently asked questions, which provided information and advice for the families. They also recommended institutions and resources of information, which could help with drug related problems.

*Module: Cooperation with the community* in the process of realizing the primary prevention of the use of drugs. *Main goal:* Providing supportive social environment in the process of the preventing practice of the consumption and alcohol, tobacco products and illegal drugs abuse.

*Thematic field:* Informing the community about the goals and problematic areas in the school program for prevention of the use of psycho active substances.

The developed materials – texts, collages, installations, games and presentations are compiled in topic based packs that are left in the partner schools and can be used either in future health education classes or by the university students in their workshops with children with deviant behaviour. Copies of the materials are given to the Municipal Centre for Drug prevention and are uploaded into the websites of the schools and of the town hall. Twice a year these continuously updated packs are presented at the Drug Prevention Fair inviting our and other youth NGOs involved in health promotion.

## Conclusions

The initial introduction of the school-based program for prevention of the use of psychoactive substances must anticipate the transformation of incidental use into regular use. This is the period of transition from primary to basic education. It should aim to decrease the risk factors and strengthen the preventing factors by:

- ✓ Providing information, formation of positive and responsible attitude to the personal health, improvement of the social skills to manage with risk situations, training to control and manage emotions, consideration of strategies to develop the abilities, the capacities, the interests and the beneficial organization of the free time.
- ✓ Active involvement of peers in the process of prevention and creation of conditions for more efficient communication and formation of knowledge and skills through the peers-teach-peers approach.
- ✓ Performance of secondary prevention aimed at students at risk that includes provision of information and training.
- ✓ Improvement of teachers' professional competence to present information, use of interactive methods, and use of resources and methods to evaluate the students' needs related to the use of psychoactive substances.
- ✓ Development of a school environment and culture that benefit the sustainability of the results of the program.
- ✓ Interaction and development of cooperation between the school, the family, the media and the community.

The philosophy of the program is that tobacco and alcohol are a “gate” to stronger drugs insuch a threshold “gate” age as adolescence. Kids, however, have an inborn power to do good and be positive. Thus the power to resist drug pressure is in them and needs to be supported and enhanced rather than transplanted. In this way the prevention workshops are both competitive and informative, team friendly and personal and able to be enjoyed by kids of that age. This program achieves a great resonance in the students for their attention is kept closely by varied animation methods and adds to a holistic educational approach where knowledge is gained with the senses, heart and the mind.

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