



driving. This phase is important in providing new knowledge and skills for dealing with new situations.

●● What is the most effective content?

Awareness about ways used to influence adolescents

Awareness of the methods of operation employed by the drug and alcohol trade has a significant effect on youth consumption.

There is now good evidence for reducing tobacco use, especially from the “Truth” Campaign in the USA, and initiatives carried out in the South-East Asia Region, that show that increasing awareness about the methods by which the drug and alcohol trade operates has a significant effect on youth consumption.

Findings indicate that the “Truth” campaign accounted for a significant portion of the recent decline in the prevalence of youth smoking (Farrelly, 2005). This campaign was carried out in the USA. It involved making teenagers aware of the tactics employed by the tobacco industry to lure young people into smoking. And more importantly, it highlighted through the media, how such tactics should be identified and countered by the youth themselves.

This approach has been tried with success in Sri Lanka for several years. It is apparent from this experience that, young people do not like to be deliberately manipulated, for instance, into considering tobacco use as smart, sophisticated and fun. Once such strategies become clear, young people often become resistant to them. In Sri Lanka similar effects have also been observed with regard to the exposure of strategies used by alcohol vendors.

In this approach, school children are encouraged to look for strategies used by the alcohol industry, especially the beer industry

to promote the use of its products. They are shown examples of direct advertisements, indirect advertisements, examples of sponsorships, events, product placements in television programmes and films. Next, they are requested to be vigilant for these and other promotions in their day-to-day life, such as while reading newspapers, watching television, travelling to and from school, at entertainment venues etc. As for tobacco, children, once able to identify promotions (be they direct or indirect), regardless of the media or the message used, become resistant to them. They are then encouraged to attempt to reverse the impact of these strategies.

Adolescents can also be inspired to protect their less informed friends – who may fall prey to such strategies. This implies that the users of alcohol and tobacco are less informed (not of the health effects, but as to how they are being manipulated) and therefore urgently need help.

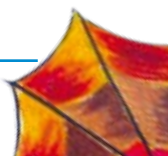
Reshaping the expectations from drugs and alcohol

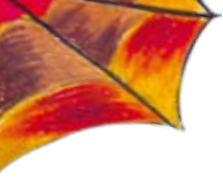
Following extensive reviews of the standard alcohol education programmes, it has been suggested that another approach would be to reshape the environment of norms and expectations and construct caring communities to reduce problems of drugs and alcohol (Keeling, 1994). This approach has shown promise in the context of this Region.

As discussed before, it has been shown that the normative education component is the most important contributor to behaviour change in social influence programmes. The approach that has shown success in Sri Lanka is wider in scope. It attempts to change the norms and expectations related to drug use by

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Reshaping the environment of norms and expectations and constructing caring communities will reduce the problems of drugs and alcohol use.





individuals, sub-groups and communities through self-examination, critical thinking and active participation.

Exploring and exposing the “culture” related to drug and alcohol use in school settings and reversing factors that promote the use of these substances have shown significant impact. How drug and alcohol use is promoted and expectancies created through words, phrases or actions that occur daily within the school milieu is ascertained and reversed through this approach. This is explained in the section on practical implementation of programmes.

Questioning the perceived effects of drugs

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Questioning the perceived effects (e.g. pleasure, courage, relaxation, increase in sexual prowess) of drugs also plays a major role in reversing the glamour attached to drug use.

Pharmacologically, some drugs have a depressant effect on the nervous system (alcohol, and opioids such as heroin), while some others do not have specific stimulant or depressant effects (e.g. cannabis). The perceptions and expectations that are created around the use of these drugs, however, are otherwise. Separating the chemical effect from the effect of expectation and the environment can play a major role in drug-use-prevention programmes especially for alcohol and most illicit drugs. This involves a more intense and rather intellectual approach, which will empower students to critically analyze their own perceptions and compare it with the real effects experienced, which are very often unpleasant (Fekjaer, 1993).

For example, heroin is chemically a depressant of the nervous system, but, in some sub-groups of heroin users, it is perceived

that it gives strength to carry out heavy manual work. Some users believe that it improves performance during sexual intercourse. Both these beliefs are contrary to the chemistry of the substance.

There are many such examples related to alcohol use too. Although it is a depressant of the nervous system, many consider that it improves the users' ability to have fun and be funny, bold or strong. Scientifically, alcohol, once taken, has to be absorbed in the intestine, and is metabolized in the liver before it is released in the systemic blood circulation, through which it can travel to the brain, and have an effect on its functions. This process usually takes around 30 to 45 minutes.

Generally, alcohol users know what they feel around an hour following alcohol use — headache, nausea, lack of coordination, etc. — which are the real chemical effects of this substance. On closer examination of alcohol-using behaviour, it becomes clear that most of the so-called “positive” effects of alcohol are felt when one joins an alcohol-using group, and begin even before actually consuming alcohol. Therefore, the positive effects which are felt are actually learned behaviour, and expectancy plays a major role (Fekjaer, 1993).

●● Who should be the target group?

As stated in the introduction, drug-use-prevention programmes can cover general audiences or specific audiences. Within the school setting too, the audience can be segmented. Although effective prevention messages and interventions should reach all students, those who are most likely to use these substances should be specifically targeted.

For drugs, the most-likely-to-use group, are the students who are more outgoing, ready to experiment and ready to follow new trends.

