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PEER-TO-PEER WORK AS AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH IN DRUG EDUCATION



What is peer-to-peer work?

- It is based on similarity of relevant experience and belonging to the same social group(s), rather than simply close age between service provider and target group
 - Peer workers provide support, guidance and help to individuals or groups based on their own knowledge and experience
 - By offering authentic examples they build trust and adopt an informal approach that facilitates an open and honest conversation in which the parties are equal
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What is peer-to-peer work?

- The three pillars of peer work are:
- 1) MUTUALITY – ensuring a healthy relationship with no power inequality
- 2) LIFE EXPERIENCE – showing the other party how to overcome life difficulties
- 3) OPTIMISM AND HOPE – inspiring the other party to make changes in their life
- It presents knowledge non-authoritatively and non-judgmentally and is informed by familiarity with the values, views and lifestyles of the target audience

What does research show?



- Most respondents have had some experience of illicit drug use: 65% in Bulgaria, 73% in Hungary, 88% in Lithuania, 95% in Poland and 68% in Serbia
- In all countries, respondents rate the formal drug education they received poorly and cite turning to the internet, friends and mass media for information
- The majority of respondents in all countries think drug education should be provided by specialized drug counselors (Bulgaria 67%, Hungary 73%, Serbia 78%, Poland 69%, Lithuania 86%), psychologists, youth workers, peer consultants, and health professionals


What does research show?



- In all 5 countries youth consider relevant lived experience, in addition to expertise, a prerequisite for educators talking to them about substances
- Main reasons youth distrust existing drug education programs: their basis in the abstinence model and scare tactics, lack of impartiality when it comes to approach, and incomplete or inaccurate information, as well as educators' inadequate knowledge

Why is peer work effective?

- The peer workers' belonging to the same relevant social group(s) as the target audience helps build trust
- The peer workers' lived experience that is relevant to the topic and similar to the experiences of the target audience legitimizes the messages they relay in the audience's eyes
- The informal, open and non-judgmental approach peer workers adopt facilitates an honest, interactive and considerate conversation which results in clearer communication and higher probability of acceptance of messages by the target audience
- Due to adherence to ethical principles related to human rights, equality and tolerance, as well as professionalism, confidentiality and leading by personal example
- It provides impartial, useful and evidence-based information



Case Study – Nightlife Outreach

- Research shows that nightlife is a relevant context for (illicit) substance use: in one survey 55% of respondents identifies parties and clubs as places where they commonly use drugs, 34% of them use psychoactive substances exclusively at night and 15% exclusively on weekends
 - The same survey demonstrated a prevalence of risky behavior such as substance mixing, equipment sharing and unprotected sexual encounters
 - Formal drug education is limited to universal prevention programs using an abstinence-based approach and scare tactics, which focuses heavily on heroin addiction and lacks harm reduction elements
 - Formal drug education model is not adapted to substance use patterns among youth
 - It is imperative to provide harm reduction services in (and related to) nightlife settings, which requires peer workers who are familiar with and present in nightlife settings
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