Adapting best practice guidelines for the detection, prevention and treatment of substance abuse in children and youngsters to a local Belgian context (ADAPT_YOUTH)

Funding country: Belgium
Project starting year: 2011
Project ending year: 2013
Area(s) of research: Prevalence, incidence and patterns of drug use, Prevention responses, Treatment responses

Objectives:
The overall aim of this project is the development of best practice guidelines for the detection, prevention and treatment of substance abuse in children and youngsters age 12 to 25, using the ADAPTE process. First, an epidemiological study will be conducted focussing on a) the prevalence of problematic alcohol and drug use in the Belgian population of children and youngsters and b) the prevalence of parental problematic alcohol and drug use. This study will apply for and consult several existing data sources (Health Interview Survey, Permanente Steekproef, Farmanet, …) and will include, where available, socio-demographic variables like gender, age or environmental issues such as family history - variables to be considered in the further guideline adaptation. In a second study, a web based survey will be conducted to identify and describe all Belgian organisations, target groups and stakeholders involved in drug- and alcohol detection, prevention or treatment. The results of this survey will be used to identify potentially important stakeholders that can be involved in the process of adaptation of existing, international guidelines to a local context. Guidelines to be used will be screened for relevance and methodological quality. A nominal group technique, developed from the methodology of participating action research, will be used to achieve the expected outcome. The research group will apply a stepwise approach focusing on the assessment of the quality of existing guidelines, their consistency, their applicability and appropriateness for a Belgian context. A set of draft guidelines will be piloted in potential user groups and these insights will be used to finalize a (set of) context-specific, best practice guideline(s) on the detection, prevention and treatment of alcohol and drug abuse in children and youngsters, adapted from existing, international guidelines. A variety of different contexts will be considered, including health care, social welfare and/or school settings. Where and when possible an umbrella guideline covering different domains (diagnostics, prevention and treatment) for different settings (health care, social welfare and/or school settings) will be produced to serve policy makers and practitioners dealing with the complexity of drug- and alcohol abuse.

Scientific discipline(s) involved: Epidemiology, Psychology, Sociology

Initial identified needs:
Although the prevalence of substance use among adolescents and young people is well-documented in Belgium, few information is available on the extent of problem drug use and risky patterns of substance use (e.g. poly drug use). Several stakeholders (e.g. harm reduction initiatives, drug treatment services, prevention workers) report an increasing number of young people who experience problems as a consequence of their drug use. Still, few specific services exist that address adolescents’ drug use. Since youth care is a decentralised authority in Belgium, while the organisation of health care belongs to the federal authorities, this division of authorities has not contributed to the development of a coherent and needs-driven system of prevention initiatives and treatment services for young drug users. Consequently, research is needed to identify existing good practices and the challenges and difficulties when establishing prevention and treatment for this population (-18 years old).

Performed by:
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