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**PREVENTION ACTIVITIES ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN NAMIBIAN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Namibia is part of the African Continent and is situated in the South Western part of Africa. 20% of the total surface of our country is taken up by the Namib Desert. We have a population of 1.8 million people. 32% of the population lives in urban and 63% in rural areas. There are 11 cultural groups, of which the Ovambo's are the biggest (49%).

Teenagers-Against-Drug-Abuse (TADA) can be described as a primary prevention programme aimed at Secondary school learners, ages 13 to 21 years. This programme started in 1992 in one of the secondary schools in Windhoek and has developed into a country wide project, involving 25 schools, 10 of which are situated in the rural areas.

2. **STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTION**

If we try to understand the different types or strategies of prevention to plan and develop prevention programmes, we should be aware of the needs, interests, development phase, social background and peer group influences on the target group.

The following are different types of programmes to prevent or reduce substance abuse among the youth, according to Tobler (1992).

2.1 **PREVENTION BY INFORMATION**

The presentation of legal, biological and psychological facts and effects of substance abuse by adults/teachers to school learners, scare tactics and limited group discussions on these topics.

The problem with this approach is that improved knowledge about substances can lead to more interest and curiosity with the school learner wishing to be modern.

2.2 **AFFECTIVE PROGRAMME (EDUCATION)**

This programme aims at building self-esteem, self-awareness and value clarification. The strategy implies the prevention of attitudes and behaviours that may lead to the use of legal and illegal substances. In these programmes the

emphasis is not placed on the substances in which the youth are interested, but on the circumstances under which the substances are misused, reasons for this misuse and strengthening the youths skills to say “no”.

2.3 **PEER GROUP PROGRAMME**

This programme includes positive peer influence, peer teaching, peer counselling, helping and facilitating. The importance of this programme lies in the youth taking cognisance of his/her peers, their behaviour, attitudes and values.

The following categories are identified:

2.3.1 **REFUSAL SKILLS**

Interpersonal enhancement, resistance skills, assertiveness skills and role models.

2.3.2 **SOCIAL AND LIFE SKILLS**

2.3.2.1 Interpersonal skills such as communication skills, modelling, feedback with social reinforcement and assertiveness skills.

2.3.2.2 Intrapersonal skills such as affective education, building self-esteem, self-awareness, value clarification, anxiety reduction, coping skills and personal competence.

2.4 **COMBINATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND AFFECTIVE EDUCATION**

This strategy focusses on individual independent decision making skills.

2.5 **ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMES**

The following are two categories.

2.5.1 **ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES** such as youth clubs, income generating activities, voluntary work and entertainment.

2.5.2 **COMPETENCE** through the development of the individual’s personal competence such as learning new job skills, administrative skills, reading and writing skills and physical activities. These skills can enhance the youth’s sense of control over his/her environment.

2.6 COMBINATION OF PEER GROUP AND ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMES

Tobler (1992) stresses that this combination shows the best results in the field of primary prevention approaches for the youth.

3. TYPES OF PREVENTATIVE PROGRAMMES

The following are examples of activities used by different TADA groups.

3.1 PEER GROUP PROGRAMMES

TADA members

- organise debates, perform dramas and songs with the anti-substance message at their schools;
- promote the anti-substance message within the school community on a day to day basis by choosing and demonstrating a healthy life style (without substances);
- invite a youth role model (national sport star, Miss Namibia) to address the school community on his/her personal lifestyle;
- start an anti-substance campaign with a caring message to fellow learners: "We know what it feels to be a teenager today, and if we can say 'no' to substances, so can you, with our support.";
- can be trained as peer counsellors;
- write articles on substances in the local school newspaper;
- of different schools discuss solutions to substance abuse in their schools, sharing positive experiences by school learners already having dealt with such problems;
- support girls in their schools in refusing to go out with boys using substances; and
- resist rules calling for the suspension of school learners who, for the first time, were caught using substances and promotes the suspension of "pushers" putting other learners' lives at risk by selling substances at school.

3.2 **ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMES**

TADA members

- receive training in organisational roles e.g. as a chairperson, secretary or treasurer, and the ability to function independently as a committee in their particular school and they are encouraged to participate in cultural, sport and religious organisations in the mentioned organisational roles;
- participate in international events (Day of the African Child, International Drug Awareness Day) and social/religious/political movements utilizing their spoken abilities;
- organize essay writing, poster, slogan and Miss TADA - competitions to utilize the free press and their writing skills;
- participate in youth programmes on the National Radio and Television where they discuss the affects of substance abuse on the youth and encourage young people to develop alternative programmes for the youth in the different regions;
- organize sport and recreational days at schools;
- organize fund raising projects to support their activities; and
- organize an annual camp for the devoted members.

4. **ESTABLISHMENT OF TADA GROUPS (FUNCTIONING)**

A TADA group at a secondary school is started as follows:

1. A member of the organization is invited to talk about substances to the school.
2. The member of the organization takes the opportunity to explain to the learners what TADA is all about.
3. A contact teacher is then identified by the school principal.
4. This TADA guardian teacher then gathers all the learners who are interested in joining TADA, together, and a TADA committee is elected.
5. The TADA committee arranges for a second visit by a member of the organization, whereby a strategy is discussed to help the TADA Committee to receive training for their different administrative roles, to gather information on substances and to address the needs of learners in that specific school.

6. The TADA Committee then decides on a programme for the coming year e.g. competitions, fund raising, speakers at their school, peer counselling training, etc.
7. As soon as the TADA Committee has come into action the committee members are sponsored with TADA T-shirts as a way of motivating members to work hard.

5. OUTCOME OF THE PROJECT

5.1 CURRENT PICTURE

Over the past 5 years, approximately 5 000 secondary school learners in Namibia has been trained and participated as TADA members.

During the past year 25 secondary schools all over the country were involved in TADA programmes, 250 school learners were part of TADA Committees and a total of 1 000 TADA members worked in their schools, carrying the anti-substance message and involving themselves in healthy alternative activities to be examples for the broader school community. These school learners are all volunteers and they are not recovered addicts, but are motivated by problems in their families and communities related to alcohol and drugs. The TADA groups provide them with a vision and an organisational framework to launch their activities.

5.2 QUANTATIVE RESEARCH

We are involved in a long term survey testing the attitudes, knowledge and behaviour of secondary school learners towards substances and assessing the work of TADA groups in the schools where TADA groups exist. It started off with a first questionnaire completed in July 1998, a follow-up survey three months later, in October 1998, and a second follow-up questionnaire during June 1999. One of the aims of this survey is to identify strategies which are effective in the TADA programmes and to make adjustments to programmes not effective. This research is done in partnership with the Centre for Partnership and Development in Oslo, Norway.

5.3 QUALITATIVE OUTCOME

School learners have started to talk openly and share their concerns about substance use/abuse amongst themselves. They have furthermore, expressed the need for establishing official political groups to work towards changing policies related to substances in schools and in their communities.

TADA groups are using the media on a regular basis, on youth programmes in all the regions.

TADA members influenced national student organizations to regularly offer presentative programmes on substance abuse through workshops in the different

regions of the country.

During July 1998 the organization started to introduce awareness programmes to parents/guardians/school teachers and other key persons on substance use/abuse at the request of the parents through the awareness raising by their children who are TADA members.

A training workshop on the TADA programme was held in Zimbabwe during the first week of August 1998. The training was done by a member of the Drug Action Group which is the mother organization of TADA.

5.4 **LIMITATIONS OF THE PROGRAMME**

There is a shortage of volunteers to organize TADA groups in all the secondary schools in Namibia. Long distances to travel to the different secondary schools prevent regular contact and interest in the programmes which are run in the different schools.

5.5 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We are privileged to have the support of school principals to work in their schools and we are also grateful for the support of the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture and the Ministry of Youth and Sport to run the Teenagers-Against-Drug-Abuse programme in Namibia.

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