

MODULE: SUBSTANCE-USE PREVENTION: ENVIRONMENT-BASED INTERVENTIONS AND MEDIA

LESSON: ENVIRONMENT-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR SUBSTANCE-USE PREVENTION

Three types of environmental prevention

Regulatory – make the healthier choice more normative

are interventions that bring about change to the regulatory environment to control what is allowed by changing legislation, or laws, to proscribe certain behaviours, or introducing regulations and rules to restrict and constrain undesirable behaviours (or even to promote desirable behaviours). Examples:

At national level: rules on under-age drinking, or drinking and driving, smoking at work, purchase ages (sales to minors).

At local level: school policies, opening hours of bars and nightlife environments. Curfew hours for minors. Mandatory staff training (responsible serving) as a condition for obtaining sales licences.

Laws and regulations can also be used to prevent vested interests from promoting unhealthy or undesirable behaviours, for example restrictions regarding tobacco or alcohol advertising, or requirements for plain packaging of cigarettes, or registered client cards for entering Cannabis shops.

Physical - make the healthier choice easier

People relate to the world around them by taking up opportunities for action (behaving).

Interventions targeting the physical environment alter properties or the placement of objects, stimuli or any built element within micro-environments (such as offices and bars) or macro environments (such as cityscape and landscape) to foster certain health-related behaviour changes.

Examples:

At city level: installing cycling lanes to reduce the use of cars, alongside increasing the density of full-service grocery stores near places of work or residences. Increasing access and availability of open (social control + conviviality) green spaces, better lightning or transport solutions can alter behaviour towards pro-social choices.

In nightlife environments: altering the design of glasses for alcoholic beverages in recreational settings (such as smaller volume and taller narrower glasses to avoid pouring in excess), offering chill-out rooms and accompanying snacks (not salty!) and having strategies to avoid overcrowding.

Economic – make the healthier choice more economic

Such measures prompt more adaptive, healthier behaviours, or reduce harmful behaviours.

The costs of healthy/unhealthy options may be influenced through taxes, pricing policies and subsidies. Examples:

At national level: increasing the taxes and prices of tobacco products or strong alcohol alcoholic drinks or on sugary consumables¹,

At micro-level: to lower the cost of healthier food options or prices of soft drinks in recreational venues (such as pubs and bars). To offer free public transport to nightlife events.

At local level: issuing subsidies (vouchers) to disadvantaged or vulnerable consumers (such as weekly vouchers that can only be exchanged for milk, fresh fruit, vegetables). Issue leisure time vouchers for youth to be spent in sports or cultural after-school activities.

Free water in nightlife establishments is another example, for which a regulatory dimension could be applied as well, if this is made mandatory for obtaining a licence. Fines for parents whose underage offspring is caught outside after curfew hours are a similar example and economic spin-offs of a regulatory measure.

Overlaps, note:

Regulatory, physical and economic categories are not necessarily distinct from each other, rather there is a continuum of environmental prevention and these three groupings are intended to provide a framework for categorising interventions. Indeed, from different theoretical or academic perspectives, the same intervention could be specified as belonging to different categories.

For example, when city councils require a minimum distance of alcohol (or cannabis) outlets to schools, this can be both a regulatory and a physical dimension of environmental prevention. Also, a Minimum Unit Price for Alcohol has both economic as well as regulatory dimensions.

What about social context?

The three dimensions, the physical, the economic, and the regulatory, are primary key targets of environmental prevention efforts.

Social context is an important influence and mediator on health behaviour and intervention success. At the centre of the social context are social interactions - the ways that people act toward or influence one another. For example, acting as role models, influential peers, or normative agents (esp. in social networks). Our behaviours are informed by our past interactions (e.g. habits); and how we respond to regulatory, physical or economic characteristics is influenced by this social context. The social context is therefore one important mediating, hence secondary mechanism for understanding the functioning, implementation and effects of environmental prevention measures. The graph in the EMCDDA publication on environmental prevention shows how environmental physical, economic and regulatory measure affect behaviour directly, as primary outcome. But most importantly, by these means they also change social context, i.e. social norms, habits, values, descriptive and injunctive norms.

¹ See for example <http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/health/behaviour-change-and-the-new-sugar-tax/>

References

The training material starting from:

European Prevention Curriculum, DOP training. Trainer's guide (2018)

R. Donini, A. Zunino, M. Piana, R. Carrozzino (ASL 2, Italy), Annemie Coone (University College Ghent – HoGent, Belgium), Henrik Jungaberle (FINDER Prevention and Drug Science, Germany), Karin Streimann, Triin Sokk (National Institute for health development, Estonia), Katarzyna Okulicz, Piotr Sedek (PARPA, Poland), Matej Košir, Sanela Talic (UTRIP, Slovenia) and the UPC-Adapt Partnership



Co-funded by the European Union's Justice Programme – Drugs Policy Initiatives

This eLearning material was funded by the European Union's Justice Programme — Drugs Policy Initiatives. The content of this learning material represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.