



The University of Akron
Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention Study:

*A Longitudinal Evaluation of the New Curricula for the D.A.R.E
Middle (7th Grade) and High School (9th Grade) Programs*

Progress Report
For
“Year Two”

December 2003

The Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention Study is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



Background: The Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention (ASAP) Study

The University of Akron's Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention Study is the first national research effort to blend the latest in prevention science with the nation's largest prevention delivery network, D.A.R.E., which operates in 80% of all school districts and reaches 36 million young people each year.

The University of Akron's Institute for Health and Social Policy, under a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and with the enthusiastic support of D.A.R.E. America, is evaluating a new curricula for the D.A.R.E. middle (7th grade) and high school (9th grade) programs called "Take Charge of Your Life."

"Take Charge of Your Life" was developed using the findings from twenty-five years of drug abuse prevention research and focuses on three major elements of effective prevention: addressing misconceptions adolescents have regarding the normative nature of substance abuse among their peers, reinforcing the perceptions of harmful consequences of substance use, and providing the communication, decision-making, and refusal skills necessary to resist the use of substances. In addition, the program is highly interactive and involves the adolescents in the learning process through small group discussions and role play around authentic, real life situations concerning the use of tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs. The goal of the project is to design and test the next generation of research-based school curricula for substance abuse prevention.

The New D.A.R.E. curricula incorporate the most up-to-date evidence and research-based strategies for tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug prevention among youth.

Testing in Six U.S. Cities

The New D.A.R.E. state-of-the-science substance abuse prevention program is being tested and evaluated for a large cohort of students in six U.S. cities— Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Newark, and St. Louis. A total of 88 high schools and their 137 feeder middle schools (making up "school clusters") from these six cities and their surrounding areas are participating in the study. Students in urban, suburban, and rural environments are involved in the study. Schools are drawn from high and low stress school districts and "school clusters" are randomly assigned to either receive the New D.A.R.E. program (the treatment condition) or not to receive the new program, but to continue ongoing prevention activities (the control condition). Nineteen thousand and three hundred and fifty eight (19,358) students are participating in the study. The impact of the revised program is being assessed through an ongoing, rigorous, scientific evaluation.

Year One (7th Grade) Curriculum Study Results

In October of 2002, the University of Akron released preliminary results of the evaluation of the New D.A.R.E. 7th grade curriculum to determine if the curriculum was achieving its intended effects. Analyses of the intermediate outcomes focused on the "school clusters" and were based on 15,662 matched baseline and post-intervention surveys. The findings showed statistically significant improvements for the treatment "school clusters" for students' decision-making skills, refusal skills, and beliefs that substance use is not the norm for adolescents.

Specific Findings of the New D.A.R.E. 7th Grade Curriculum:

- **More students had better decision-making skills.** The research found that decision making skills scores for those students receiving the New D.A.R.E. curriculum were 6 percent higher than for control group schools.
- **More students found drug use socially inappropriate and believed fewer peers used drugs:** Results show the schools that received the New D.A.R.E. curriculum documented as much as a 19

percent reduction in normative beliefs about the prevalence of substance use among their peers, demonstrating that more students receiving the new program perceive lower rates of substance use by their peers than students in the control schools.

- **More students learned how to refuse alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana:** Refusal skills were significantly higher -- 5 percent -- among students who received the New D.A.R.E. curriculum as compared to control group students.
- **Fewer students reported intent to use inhalants:** Scores were significantly lower by as much as 4 percent with respect to intent to use inhalants for those students who received the New D.A.R.E. curriculum.

Progress Report: “Year Two” of the ASAP Study

Surveys were administered again when the students were in the 8th grade, approximately one year after the post-intervention 7th grade portion of the New D.A.R.E. “Take Charge of Your Life” curriculum. As in the “Year One” analyses, comparisons were made between the treatment and control “school clusters.” Matched data for baseline and 8th grade surveys were available for 14,104 students.

“Year Two” ASAP Study Results

Like “Year One,” the findings from “Year Two” of the Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention Study are promising and in-line with the Study’s outcome expectations. Specifically, “Year Two” data show:

Those students who received the New D.A.R.E. 7th grade program, “Take Charge of Your Life,” continued in the 8th grade to have improved scores on decision-making skills and beliefs that drug use is socially inappropriate.

Because youth at the 8th grade level are characterized usually by low levels of drug use, the fact that there were no differences between treatment and control students in substance use is not surprising or unexpected. The New D.A.R.E. program is intended to produce results with respect to reductions in drug use as students *progress* through their high school years.

Looking Ahead at “Year Three”

Students in the Study’s treatment high schools will be receiving the 9th grade portion of the New D.A.R.E. “Take Charge of Your Life” curriculum during the 2003-2004 school year (“Year Three”). Baseline and post-intervention data will be collected from all students. In addition, analytic adjustments will be made to accommodate for the exposure of students to other prevention programs. Based on data collected to date, it is anticipated that the promising findings from years “One” and “Two” of the Study will continue in “Year Three.” Students will be followed for three additional years until the 11th grade (“Year 5”).

It should be noted that the New D.A.R.E. 7th and 9th grade curricula intentionally target the 8th and 10th grade peak “at-risk” years in accordance with NIDA’s newly updated (September 2003) guide, *Preventing Drug Use among Children and Adolescents* which cites the critical need for ongoing prevention “booster sessions,” especially during times of increased risk. *Prevention is a process that occurs not over months, but years!*

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