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# School – Based Extremism and Drug Abuse Prevention in the UK

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## Abstract

Young people and teenagers are the most vulnerable group for radical influences due to the fact that they are the most energetic and dynamic social group prone to social protest and high-risk behaviors. Another risk factor for young people to become involved in extreme activities is drug addiction. Extremism and drug addiction have common ground. Being global in nature, both phenomena have destructive character and serious consequences for humankind. Terrorism acts regarded as a form of violent extremism are often carried out by aggressors being drunk or under the influence of psychoactive substances. Drugs are a part of extremist organizations which are often funded by financial resources obtained from drug trafficking. Based on the position that radicalization is a process and not a one-time event, it is possible to intervene to prevent problems that may arise. Therefore seems appropriate for a specific provision of prevention initiatives to be included in the educational process. Since drug addiction is one of the risk factors for experimenting with extremism, it worth using a public health approach to counter the extremist ideology in a similar way to safeguarding processes to protect students from drug abuse. The study considers the UK's successful initiatives such as "From one extreme to another", "Getting Together" and "Channel" that target students and teachers in order to increase their awareness of the risks of extremism and prevent violence.

*Keywords:* prevention, education, students, extremism, drug abuse.

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## **Introduction**

In confronting extremism, an exclusive focus on the punitive sanctions can be an obstacle to the prevention of extremist behavior. Counter-terrorism initiatives can influence the exclusion of some ethnic communities (for example, Muslim) when they are considered as a religious group from among the suspects, rather than an ally in the preventive efforts. In addition, counter-terrorism policy, isolating one group or another, can result in the erosion of social cohesion, which is believed to be one of the most crucial society's abilities to unite all social and cultural groups for the purpose of collaborative struggle.

Based on the position that radicalization is a process, one can intervene in the course of this process in order to prevent the involvement of vulnerable people in extremist activities. Attention should be drawn to the youth as the most vulnerable group for radical influences due to their keen perception of the world and the dominance of the sense of idealism. In this regard, educational policy becomes important for a number of reasons.

Firstly, preventive counter-radicalization measures in secondary schools can reach a broad social group at the developing stage. Secondly, highly radicalized people tend to be more highly educated than the general population. Since extremist advocates are focused on educational environments and young people, measures to combat radicalization implemented through educational institutions can be very useful in terms of protecting adolescent population from violent radicalization (Horgan, 2005; De Jong JTVM, 2010).

## **Problem Statement**

Drug addiction has proved to be a further factor for young people to become radicalized. Extremism and drug abuse are interrelated. Both phenomena have destructive and global nature causing irreparable harm to all mankind. Frequently the perpetrators of acts of terrorism are under the influence of psychoactive substances. In addition, drug trafficking constitutes a financial basis of international terrorism. Therefore, in order that drug abuse does not move to criminal and further to extremist behavior school-based drug education of young people should be considered as contribution to the prevention of radicalization.

## **Research Questions**

How is school-based extremism and drug abuse prevention in the UK implemented? What are the peculiarities of school-based drug education initiatives that make them effective in prevention both drug addiction and radicalization?

## **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study is to describe the organization of school-based extremism and drug abuse prevention in UK and reveal some features of students' drug education.

## **Research Methods**

The research methods used in the study were as follows: the method of theoretical analysis and synthesis of scientific literature on the problem; aggregation of previous pedagogical research and comparative analysis. Due to the complexity of the subject of research, the study employed a

comprehensive approach that allowed analyzing drug addiction and extremism as complex and multi-level phenomena.

## Findings

Recently, the United Kingdom to a larger extent from all European countries has faced a problem of domestic terrorism. The terrorist attacks in the UK have been committed by educated young people, not foreign religious groups. Therefore, to explain the fact that common people are recruited and persuaded to sacrifice their lives one can assume the process of violent radicalization.

The UK's counter-terrorism strategy CONTEST adopted in 2003 is based on four components:

- Prevent: aims at preventing common people from becoming terrorists or supporting them through informing and improving people's understanding of risks of involvement in terrorism and enables earlier intervention;
- Pursue: consists in defining and breaking up extremist and terrorist organizations and formations;
- Protect: aims at strengthening country's protection against terrorist attacks;
- Prepare: aims at mitigating the impact of a terrorist attack (Silke, 2011).

To this end, two complementary approaches are being taken:

1. General prevention to combat extremist ideas and influences in society, promotion of tolerant, inclusive and multi-faith societies and democratic principles as well as elimination of risk factors of vulnerability to radicalization.

2. Preventive efforts targeted at those who are at risk of adopting extremist views.

"From one extreme to another" and "Getting Together" are among the most successful school targeted initiatives undertaken by the police in order to raise awareness about the risks of extremism among children, adolescents and teachers, prevent violence and eradicate negative attitudes towards the police.

"From one extreme to another" is a game run by a theater company, drawing parallels between radicalism associated with extreme right-wing and Islamist violence. This project is a highly effective tool for educating children about the dangers of extremism, intolerance and terrorism, and has encompassed more than 50,000 schoolchildren, many of whom live in isolated and depressed communities in north-west England. Funding is provided from local budgets.

The project "Getting Together" was originally designed as a DVD-based program for schools and colleges of supplementary education by Cardiff teachers, a local imam and scholars from the Muslim Council of Wales. It provides sound criticism of Islamic extremism, and also aims to help teachers understand which children may be susceptible to extremism. This project is currently being continued in the "Challenging Extremism" program thanks to the support of the Wales government. The program is offered to schools and colleges, social welfare officers, youth, warders, police officers and others who may come in contact with people vulnerable to radicalization.

The "Channel" project is a very flexible intervention program, controlled by the police and several other government partners, to support vulnerable people. The project is structured around a program coordinator who is appointed for each local government district. As a rule, it is the representative of the police. This person is responsible for assessing all persons in his district with a view of his or her risk of becoming an extremist. A wide range of program partners (police officers, schools', universities', colleges' staff, medical and social workers, prison staff) can inform the coordinator about vulnerable persons. With

an individual who has been supposedly identified as susceptible to extremist positions, further meetings with the police and specialists are being held in order to assess whether the declared risk is true. If a person is deemed not to be at risk, no further action is taken; if, as it is believed, he or she is at risk of becoming radical, preventive intervention may be initiated (by the police, teachers, local community leaders, according to the evaluation of the program coordinator).

Though technically there is no minimum or maximum age for participation in the “Channel”, most of the participants are teenagers or young people at the age of about twenty years old. A small number of interventions were conducted with adolescents under the age of ten.

In general, researchers assess the project as successful in preventing extremism, as well as cost-effective. Most of the work to be done is shared among existing departments (for example, the police, local council workers, etc.), and, consequently, new financial costs aren't required (Vidino et al., 2012).

Current drug situation in the UK is characterized by the following specific features:

1) normalization of drug use among young people that means drugs have become a normal part of life (Parker et al., 1998);

2) drug addiction has ceased to be a predominantly urban phenomenon involving the rural population (Galt, 1997);

3) a decrease in age of initiation of drug use.

School-based drug education of students in the UK is being implemented in two ways. Firstly, the preventive component is subject to mandatory inclusion in natural sciences curriculum in all public schools. Secondly, drug education is recommended to be expanded through its integration in non-statutory discipline Personal, social and health education (PSHE). The discipline covers the key stages (1-4) and is built around three overlapping topics: health and wellbeing, relationships and living in the wider world. These themes focus on health education, including substance abuse, sex and relationships issues, aspects of career and economic education. In fact, through PSHE schools stimulate and support the personal and social development of the students since within the framework of a structured course, they receive not only theoretical knowledge, but also form practical skills of healthy, safe and responsible lifestyle and active discouragement of substance abuse (Ofsted, 2013).

PSHE covers all stages of learning, starting from primary school with volume and content of presented material being increased as students grow older.

Some researchers note that the growing independence of public schools may have an effect on the quality of drug education implementation and teacher training in the field of substance abuse prevention. For instance, in 2011, 90% of teachers who implement PSHE didn't receive special training (Thurman & Boughelaf, 2015). The authorities, for their part, encourage schools to deliver effective drug education of students through foundation of the PSHE Association and Mentor-ADEPIS service. The former is aimed at supporting school staff in developing drug abuse prevention programs while the latter serves as a platform for the exchange of evidence-based information and resources in the field of drug and alcohol abuse prevention.

School-based prevention programs differ in their diversity with respect to the target audience, levels of implementation, and the theoretical models underlying the intervention. Programs may vary in goals: from total prevention of experimentation with substances to reducing the harm from such experimentation. Drug education programs realized in the UK can be divided into original and unoriginal ones. The former are developed directly in the country and the latter are adopted from other cultures and altered to meet British realities.

The analysis of organization of drug education in British schools (Gizyatova et al., 2017) has enabled to outline the following principles of development and implementation of school-based drug abuse prevention programs:

1. The principle of complexity that provides a combination of different models of drug education in the same program, as well as the cooperation of various agencies.
2. The principle of multipolarity that takes into account all possible risk factors and those engaged in the teaching and learning activities for the prevention of drug addiction.
3. The principle of adaptability considers the conditions of a particular social group and the target audience.
4. The principle of interactivity allows students to learn the skills in the course of active social interaction of the subjects of educational process.
5. The principle of advance ensures that preventive interventions start before the students experiment with substances.
6. The principle of positivity rejects the tactics of intimidating students, emphasizing instead the development of their personal resources.
7. The principle of competence is ensured by the presence in each preventive program of the component responsible for the pre-training of teachers.
8. The principle of continuity means that school-based drug education takes place at all key stages.

## **Conclusion**

High-quality education itself can play an important role in helping young people distance themselves from extremism. Increased awareness, education for citizenship and respect for others can act as a means of developing intercultural communication skills (Fakhrutdinova, 2010). However, this skill alone is insufficient to prevent extremism as there are cases when highly educated people commit acts of violent extremism. Further work in the area of development of new socially significant projects countering extremism is needed.

Since drug abuse is considered to be one of the risk factors for experimentation with extreme behavior, public health approach in confronting the extremist ideology can be applied, similar to the strategies used to prevent drug abuse.

As experimentation with substances is often associated with social environment, the integration of drug education into the program “Personal, social and health education” is fully justified. Not an isolated, but an interconnected implementation context in which drug education echoes other areas of life that also affect the health and well-being of children and adolescents, will ensure continuity, consistency and greater productivity of the learning process. Many of the skills developed through drug education are also relevant in other areas of the subject “Personal, social and health education”. For example, peer pressure skills are applicable to personal security; drug abuse can affect mutual relations between adolescents and their sexual health. The civic education component also presented in PSHE contributes to drug education of students, giving them the opportunity to familiarize themselves with various attitudes, moral and social issues, understand the rules and laws, and how they relate to rights and obligations. Thus, the overlapping context of drug education should contribute to students’ comprehensive personal and social development.

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