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## ***Pilotní ověřování preventivního programu vycházejícího z modelu komplexního vlivu sociálního prostředí („Unplugged“) v Gruzii: formativní evaluace***



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**Citace:** Javakhishvili, D. J., Javakhishvili, N., Miovský, M., Razmadze, M., Kandelaki, N. (2014). Piloting the comprehensive social influence ('Unplugged') programme in Georgia: a formative study. *Adiktologie*, 14(2), 00-00.

**VÝCHODISKA:** Ve spolupráci s Klinikou adiktologie 1. LF UK v Praze realizoval v období od 1. ledna do 15. prosince 2012 Psychologický ústav Illovy státní univerzity v Gruzii projekt formativně evaluační studie, který byl inspirován evropským projektem evaluace primárně preventivních programů v oblasti užívání návykových látek (EUDAP-1) a randomizovanou kontrolovanou studií efektivity preventivních intervencí realizovanou v České republice. **CÍLE:** Formativní evaluace pilotní realizace preventivní intervence „Unplugged“ v Gruzii a její přenesení do gruzínského socio-kulturního kontextu. **METODY:** Formativně evaluační studie byla provedena za využití kvalitativních výzkumných metod, zejména akčně-výzkumného workshopu, polostrukturovaného rozhovoru a ohniskových skupin. Při analýze a interpretaci dat byly použity metody kódování, klastrování, kategorizace, kontrastování a komparace. **SOUBOR:** Dvačet tři školáků ve věku od 11 do 14 let, čtyři vyučující, pět

školních psychologů a tři ředitelé tří soukromých škol v Tbilisi. **VÝSLEDKY:** Jak děti, tak vyučující spatřují bezprostřední účinky programu ve vyšším povědomí o rizicích spojených s užíváním drog a ve vyšší sebedůvěře při interakce ve školním kolektivu. Studie potvrzuje, že metodika programu založeného na modelu komplexního vlivu sociálního prostředí jako taková je pro gruzínský socio-kulturní kontext vhodná. **ZÁVĚR:** Za facilitační faktory z hlediska implementace metodiky „Unplugged“ v gruzínských školách lze považovat motivaci vedení školy k opatřením přispívajícím k osobní pohodě žáků, zájem žáků a motivace školních psychologů/pedagogů k osvojení si dané metodiky. Mezi možné překážky patří nedostatek zkušeností pracovníků školy v oblasti prevence, dosavadní tabuizace problematiky drog v zemi, přísně vymezené školní osnovy s minimální možností jejich doplnění o nový předmět bez toho, aby jej ministerstvo školství zařadilo mezi povinnou součást kurikula.

**KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:** PREVENCE UŽÍVÁNÍ NÁVYKOVÝCH LÁTEK – PROGRAM „UNPLUGGED“ – EUDAP – KVALITATIVNÍ FORMATIVNÍ VÝZKUM

**Došlo do redakce:** 21 / ZÁŘÍ / 2013

**Přijato k tisku:** 7 / BŘEZEN / 2014

**Grantová podpora:** Tento výzkum byl proveden v rámci projektu „Prevence užívání návykových látek na základních a středních školách v Gruzii“, realizovaného za finanční podpory Illovy státní univerzity.

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# Piloting the Comprehensive Social Influence ('Unplugged') Programme in Georgia: a Formative Study



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**Citation:** Javakhishvili, D. J., Javakhishvili, N., Miovský, M., Razmadze, M., Kandelaki, N. (2014). Piloting the Comprehensive Social Influence ('Unplugged') Programme in Georgia: a Formative Study. *Adiktologie*, 14(2), 00-00.

**BACKGROUND:** Inspired by the European Drug Addiction Prevention Trial EUDAP-1 and the Czech randomised controlled prevention study, a formative research project was implemented in Georgia from January 1 to December 15, 2012 by the Ilia State University Institute of Psychology, in cooperation with the Department of Addictology of the 1st Medical Faculty of Charles University in Prague.

**AIM:** Formative evaluation of the piloting of the 'Unplugged' intervention in Georgia and its adaptation to the Georgian socio-cultural context. **METHOD:** A formative evaluation study was conducted, involving qualitative research methods, including an action research workshop, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The methods of analysis and interpretation used included coding, clustering, categorisation, contrast, and comparing. **SAMPLE:** Twenty-three school students in the age range from 11-14, five schoolteachers, four school psychologists, and the directors of three private schools in Tbilisi.

**RESULTS:** Both the children and teachers see the immediate outcomes of the programme in increased awareness of the drug-related risks and increased self-confidence in social settings amongst students; the study confirms that the methodology of the comprehensive social influence programme itself is appropriate to the Georgian socio-cultural context. **CONCLUSIONS:** The facilitative factors for the implementation of 'Unplugged' in Georgian schools are: school managers' motivation to contribute to the well-being of their students; interest on the part of the students, and motivation on the part of the school psychologists/teachers to master the method; the obstacles include: the lack of experience of prevention of school staff members; existing taboos about drugs in the country, and too-strict school curricula with little chance of adding a new subject unless the Ministry of Education puts it into the 'must-do' category.

**KEY WORDS:** DRUG PREVENTION – 'UNPLUGGED' PROGRAMME – EUDAP – QUALITATIVE FORMATIVE RESEARCH

**Submitted:** 21 / SEPTEMBER / 2013

**Accepted:** 7 / MARCH / 2014

**Grant support:** The research was carried out within the framework of the project 'Prevention of Drug Misuse in Primary and Secondary Schools of Georgia', implemented with the financial support of Ilia State University.

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## ● 1 INTRODUCTION

The Universal Prevention (according to the EMCDDA terminology) of Drug Addiction in Georgia started to develop in the late 1990s, together with the establishment of a few drug-focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Small-scale school and community-based prevention projects were implemented with the financial support of international donors such as the European Commission, USAID, and different EU members' embassies. The interventions were mainly donor-driven, small-scale (with a maximum of 300 direct beneficiaries per year in the best-case scenario), inconsistent, and fragmentary, with a lack of coordination and no mechanisms for quality control (Javakhishvili et al., 2011).

Besides NGO projects there were occasional small government agency initiatives, addressing universal prevention via the intensive utilisation of a 'War on Drugs' approach. One example was a campaign introduced in Tbilisi one autumn morning in 2004. Using the motto 'A Killer is Walking in the Town', large posters were distributed in all the central districts of the city, without any indication of who or what the killer was, causing anxiety in the general public until evening, when it was announced via TV that by 'Killer' the campaign organisers meant 'Drugs' and 'Drug Addiction' (Javakhishvili, 2009).

After 2000, the modestly scaled work by NGOs diminished even more as a result of the increased attention paid by the donor community to HIV/AIDS prevention and the switching of almost all programmes from universal prevention to the HIV/AIDS prevention field. In 2010-2012, the few universal prevention interventions that existed in the country dealt with tobacco use and road safety, as well as HIV/AIDS prevention activities, on an extremely modest scale (Javakhishvili et al., 2012). No institutional mechanisms for school-based prevention exist in the country at the moment.

To address this gap, Ilia State University Institute of Psychology, in cooperation with the Charles University Department of Addictology, initiated a project, funded by the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science, aimed at studying the experience of piloting the 'Unplugged' programme in Georgia.

Preventive school-based programmes focused on substance abuse were first introduced in the United States, followed by other countries, including ones in Europe. The research, including meta-analysis, shows that certain programmes are able to help adolescents refrain from substance use if they are provided with adequate information regarding its harmful effects (Faggiano et al., 2005; Van der Kraft et al., 2009).

These programmes, however, did not establish themselves immediately; they underwent dramatic changes as a result of study and constant evaluation of their systematic

effects, as well as the introduction of psychological and educational approaches to education. Currently, after many years of experience, some of the programmes are no longer considered useful, while others have proved successful – the 'Unplugged' programme ([www.eudap.net](http://www.eudap.net)) among them. The advances of the 'Unplugged' programme lie in such features as its combining cognitive (information on substance use), affective (emotional control), and behavioural (resistance to group pressure, assertive behaviour) aspects in the training.

'Unplugged' is an innovative school-based curriculum to fight substance use by young people. It was developed as a standardised package to be implemented and evaluated within a multi-centre study in seven European countries: Belgium, Germany, Spain, Greece, Italy, Austria, and Sweden (Faggiano et al., 2007; Faggiano et al., 2008; Van der Kraft et al., 2009; Faggiano et al., 2010; Caria et al., 2011; Caria et al., 2013). Currently, the programme is running in 15 member states of the European Union (Miovsky, 2011; Miovsky, 2012).

The piloting of 'Unplugged' in the Czech Republic took place in 2007-2010. As part of the EUDAP piloting, the authors conducted a formative experimental evaluation using both qualitative and quantitative methods, targeting evaluation of both the process and the outcomes of the programme (Miovský et al., 2007; Jurystová et al., 2009; Adamkova et al., 2009; Jurystova, Miovský et al., 2010; Miovský et al., 2011; Gabrhelik et al., 2012; Miovský et al., 2014). As a result of their formative research, the Czech colleagues made suggestions that included the transformation of the manual for teachers and modification of time limits or the number of activities for one lesson, and clarified the need for, and defined the formats of, experts' participation in the implementation of the 'Unplugged' programme.

## ● 2 METHODOLOGY

### ● 2 / 1 Method and study design

To adjust the 'Unplugged' programme to the socio-cultural context of Georgia, a formative research study was implemented, using such qualitative methods as a formative workshop, focus groups, and individual interviews.

The study design included:

- 3 formative workshops with a group consisting of four teachers and five psychologists who received 'Unplugged' training in the preparatory phase of the project, during which we went through all the sessions of the 'Unplugged' module, working on the adjustment of each session to the specific features of the local environment;
- provision of ongoing supervision to the facilitators during the implementation of the programme, revealing gaps in their preparation and also culturally sensitive aspects of the programme that needed to be reshaped;

- a round of semi-structured interviews with the three directors of the schools involved in the piloting; three focus groups with the students targeted by the intervention, and one focus group with the facilitators who implemented the 'Unplugged' intervention (see description of the sample below).

To conduct the study, two different sets of focus group questionnaires were composed (for the students, to study their views on the contents, process, and outcomes of the programme after the intervention, and for the 'Unplugged' facilitators to collect their feedback on the process and outcomes of the programme after its implementation). Apart from this, a semi-structured questionnaire was composed for the interviews (with the schools' directors) to study facilitative factors and barriers to the implementation of the programme, as well as their views on the process and outcomes of the piloting.

**Data management:** The data obtained via the focus groups and semi-structured interviews were managed by means of the 5-steps approach (Fritz, 2008); the methods of analysis and interpretation implied coding, clustering, categorisation, contrast, and comparing, as well as the Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2001; Smith, 2001).

**Engaging schools:** The selection criterion for the schools was the motivation of school managers to be involved in the programme. On the basis of this criterion, six private schools were selected for participation, and nine teachers and psychologists from these schools participated in the training. Out of these six schools, three were chosen for the intervention on the basis of the following criteria: a) success of the teachers and psychologists in the 'Unplugged' training course and therefore the quality of their work as Unplugged Programme facilitators being predictable; (b) enough children in the 11-14 age range at the school.<sup>1</sup>

**Sample:** the composition of the qualitative study sample included:

- 23 students in the 11-14 age range selected randomly from the 100 youngsters who participated in the 'Unplugged' intervention (out of these 100, 43 were aged 11, 20 aged 12, 20 aged 13, and 17 aged 14);
- the four schoolteachers who participated in the 'Unplugged' training. One became the 'Unplugged' facilitator in one of the schools;
- the five school psychologists who participated in the 'Unplugged' training and became 'Unplugged' facilitators;
- the directors of the three targeted schools.

### ● 3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

**Adaptation of the material:** During the translation the following culture-specific changes were made to the texts: a change of the European names of the characters used in the manuals to Georgian names, a change of the culture-specific items (e.g. a scooter, which is not common in Georgia, was replaced by a bicycle), and a change of culture-specific social interactions (e.g. dating was replaced by flirting); in addition, on the basis of the ESPAD survey conducted in Georgia (Baramidze & Sturua, 2009), the list of drugs used in the student's workbook and cards was reduced to the drugs which are in use in Georgian youth culture (e.g. cocaine was excluded as it is not common in Georgia). A formative workshop was conducted with the group of four teachers and five psychologists during the preparatory phase of the research, on the basis of which particular exercises were reshaped to make them culturally appropriate and thus feasible for implementation (e.g. role plays implying possible unstructured emotional outbursts by the participants were replaced with more structured role plays to avoid too much chaos during the sessions, taking into consideration the open culture and emotional temperament of the local society).

**Important points revealed during capacity building:** At the beginning we planned to conduct one training event lasting two and a half days for the future facilitators of the comprehensive social influence curriculum, but in the course of the implementation we prolonged the training to five days as it appeared that Georgian schoolteachers do not have much experience and knowledge about drug issues or interactive methods of teaching. Work on the adaptation of the curriculum was going on during these sessions as well, and this required additional time.

**Important points in implementation of the 'Unplugged' curriculum:** 'Unplugged' sessions were implemented in seven classes within the three selected private schools. Five classes were facilitated by school psychologists, who appeared to be more motivated and able to become 'Unplugged' facilitators than the teachers. Two classes were facilitated by the teachers. Twelve 'Unplugged' sessions were held twice a week for three months in each class (because of the time limits of the research project).

**Implementation of qualitative research (individual interviews, focus groups, action research workshop):** The qualitative formative research was implemented on the basis of the study design and methodology described above, by a team of psychologists trained in qualitative methods of research. A team of two researchers conducted the fieldwork, while data analysis and interpretation was performed by two expert psychologists.

1/ The private schools in Tbilisi are often small, i.e., with only 5-7 students of the same age in the class. The chosen schools have larger classes – i.e., a minimum of 12 children, which gave us an opportunity to conduct normal 'Unplugged' sessions.

## ● 4 STUDY FINDINGS

### ● 4 / 1 Organisational and institutional factors

All the school directors who were interviewed expressed interest in introducing drug prevention measures in their respective schools, which we consider a key factor in facilitating schools' engagement in the programme. At the same time, the very tight general curriculum in the schools and limited opportunities to find room for 'Unplugged' sessions, which were stressed both by the directors and 'Unplugged' facilitators, revealed that there is no chance of sustainability for the 'Unplugged' programme unless the Ministry of Education and Science incorporates it into the general curriculum of primary education.

### ● 4 / 2 Motivational factors

Contrary to the school directors, the teachers expressed less enthusiasm for the programme as their low salaries do not help them feel motivated to learn new things: 'I am already stretched enough between my job responsibilities and struggle to satisfy the basic needs of my family.'<sup>2</sup> In addition, the schoolteachers also worried about parents' possible negative reaction to discussing drug problems with their kids (as talking about drugs is taboo in Georgia).

According to the school psychologists who were interviewed, a need to master professional tools addressing the behavioural problems of schoolchildren facilitated their active engagement in the 'Unplugged' programme: 'Even if you did not choose us as 'Unplugged' facilitators, we would attend the training, to learn the method, as we need it.'

The students enjoyed both the content and the interactive format of 'Unplugged', which facilitated their active participation: 'We like the fact that it is not just normal/formal lessons, that we were seated in a circle and expected to brainstorm, and role-play, and besides discussing serious things, to have fun'.

None of the schools managed to engage parents, as a result of the lack of time for both the 'Unplugged' facilitators and parents.

### ● 4 / 3 Lack of capacity

The low level of awareness of the schoolteachers and psychologists about drug problems indicates the need for deeper training so they are confident about implementing the 'Unplugged' curriculum with their students: instead of the initially intended two and a half days, we prolonged the training to five days.

2/ The maximum monthly salary for a schoolteacher in Georgia was a little over 400 GEL (200 EUR) in 2012, while the average monthly salary in 2011 for employees in the public sector was 589 GEL (295 EUR), and for employees in the non-public sector it was 670 GEL (335 EUR) (<http://www.geostat.ge>, 2013).

### ● 4 / 4 Age differences

We observed some age-related differences: the 11- and 12-year-old students were more engaged and enthusiastic than the 13-year-olds, and the 14-year-olds were the most difficult to engage, because of a lack of motivation and their usually disorganised behaviour during the sessions. The 11- and 12-year-olds very much appreciated the play- and game-based format of the curriculum while the 13- and especially 14-year-olds said they wanted more lecturing and PowerPoint presentations than roleplays and games.

### ● 4 / 5 Format of preventive activities

The facilitators' feedback stressed that 45-minute lessons are too short to cover all the topics included in each session, and they pointed to the need to prioritise the material in each session in order to select activities tailored to the needs and interests of particular groups of students.

### ● 4 / 6 Outcomes of preventive activities

The students were positive regarding the outcomes of the programme. Their feedback illustrates this: 'Now I understand better my mum's advice not to smoke,' 'Now I understand better what kind of harm alcohol and tobacco can cause and I am pretty sure I am against it,' 'Now I know what kind of bad consequences marijuana use can lead to, I've never thought about that,' 'We became more friendly and learned how to act as a team,' 'It became easier for me to interact with the people around, to make friends.'

The school directors and teachers said they see the immediate results of the programme in the increased awareness of their students of drug-related risks and their increased self-confidence in social interactions; at the same time, they stressed the necessity for following up these outcomes in order to notice/indicate changes in the behaviour of the students ('too early to conclude anything about sustainable behavioural changes').

## ● 5 DISCUSSION

The formative study revealed that the culture-specific adaptation of the 'Unplugged' programme is successful, as it works in the Georgian socio-cultural context, in Georgian schools. Many countries have adapted the primary, original version to their local context. The first group of countries which implemented 'Unplugged' participated in creating this intervention under the umbrella of the EUDAP-1 project (e.g. Italy, Belgium, Sweden etc.). In the second wave more countries participated in the EUDAP-2 project, targeted at the development and improvement of implementation strategies for the Unplugged intervention (e.g. the Czech Republic, Poland etc.). At present, there are more independent smaller implementation projects, including some Arab countries and Russia ([http://www.eudap.net/Research\\_About.aspx](http://www.eudap.net/Research_About.aspx)). The adaptation process, described in



this article, brought us to the new 'Georgian' version of the original 'Unplugged' programme, with some terms and concepts being changed according to the local context. We also took peer-led sessions and parental education out from the original programme for the following reasons: in the case of peer-led sessions there is no quality assurance mechanism in place; as for parents' sessions, they were cancelled as a result of the lack of motivation both among teachers and parents to dedicate time and energy to parent drug education.

The study showed that school psychologists are more motivated to be in charge of the implementation of 'Unplugged' sessions than teachers are. We can attribute that to the deficiency of psychological and developmental tools among this generation of currently active school psychologists, who graduated in the 1970s and 1980s and were not provided with an adequate university education and practical working tools. Their level of knowledge and professionalism depends on their own capacity for self-education. The 'Unplugged' programme gave them a good chance to enhance their professional capacity, which served as an incentive for them.

At the same time, the study shows that to implement 'Unplugged' effectively, it is necessary to institutionalise it: to incorporate it into the system of primary/secondary education of Georgia, to turn it into a planned activity with its own space and time in the general curricula of primary and secondary schools, with specific teachers/psychologists responsible for its implementation, as demanded by the standards of national education. This will increase motivation for its implementation among public schools.

A low level of awareness of drug problems among the general population and teachers especially (Javakhishvili, 2009; Javakhishvili, 2011) indicates the need for longer and deeper training for teachers to make them able and confident to implement the 'Unplugged' curriculum with their students. The cultural specifics of Georgia need to be taken into account. The study also revealed a need for institutional mechanisms for the education of teachers and psychologists in the drug field to help them to overcome anxiety related to the implementation of the 'Unplugged' curriculum caused by their low level of awareness of drug problems, as well as the widespread myth that speaking about drugs with students is dangerous because it provokes an unhealthy interest in drug consumption (Javakhishvili, 2011). Since two and a half days for the training of teachers/psychologists as 'Unplugged' facilitators is not long enough to teach the skills to implement the comprehensive social influence curriculum, there is a need for the institutionalisation of education in the Comprehensive Social Influence curriculum within the format of teachers' continuing education, as well as the incorporation of primary drug prevention education into university curricula

for future school teachers and psychologists. Current developments in the field of addictology education in Georgia make this doable (Kirtadze et al., 2011).

The age of the students is a very important variable for the successful implementation of the programme. Surveys indicate that the incidence of the first substance use increases rapidly up to the age of 15, when stabilisation occurs (Kandel & Yamaguchi, 1993). The interest in participation among students shows that the optimal age for the implementation of 'Unplugged' in Georgia is 11-13. As for older adolescents, the 'Unplugged' facilitators participated in a study to design a different programme for 14-year-olds. Suggestions were made to make it shorter (6 sessions instead of 12) and to include more information on drugs and drug-related risks in the format of group discussions (instead of roleplays and games).

## ● 6 CONCLUSIONS

The piloting of the 'Unplugged' programme in Georgia has clearly shown that its adaptation to the local context was needed. When adapted to the local context, the texts in the Unplugged materials – teacher's book, students' book, and workbook, as well as the curriculum itself – made it an appropriate tool for primary schools to use for the prevention of risky behaviour among schoolchildren. Experience of the three waves of applying the 'Unplugged' programme in different countries worldwide proves the same need for adaptation. Therefore, Georgia is no exception.

The study provided an important result in terms of the age of the school students to be involved in the 'Unplugged' programme: it works optimally for those aged 11-13; older students are not satisfied with the format of the programme and as a result are not interested or influenced by it. This means that if the programme is implemented into the national curriculum, it should be conducted at the primary school level (the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades of primary school). Later on, in secondary schools, it could be modified into a shorter programme using the format of brief lectures with PowerPoint presentations followed by discussions, to assure the continuity of drug prevention efforts.

The piloting revealed that parents do not prioritise drug education and are not interested in attending the 'Unplugged' programme's sessions targeting them.

The facilitative factors for the implementation of 'Unplugged' are school managers' motivation to contribute to the well-being of their students, the interest of the students, and the motivation of the school psychologists to master the methods. The obstacles to its implementation are the low level of competence of school staff with regard to drug issues, the social consensus regarding silence on drug issues in Georgia, and the related fear of talking about it.

One more important finding of the study is that a top-down approach is needed to implement this

programme on a country-wide scale; the schools are not aware, equipped, or interested enough to be ready to implement the programme on their own.

**Role of the authors:** DJJ and NJ designed the study, wrote the protocol, supervised the implementation, and interpreted the data; MM provided methodological guidance at all stages of the research project; DJJ also conducted the formative workshops, supervised the process of the implementation of 'Unplugged', and drafted the initial version of the manuscript; MR and NK implemented the semi-structured interviews and focus groups with the students, teachers, and directors, and processed the resultant data. All the authors contributed to and approved the final manuscript.

**Conflict of interest:** There is no conflict of interest in this study as there was a clear division of roles/contributions within the frame of the research project: the team of researchers (the authors of this paper) were responsible for the design and implementation of the study, while the psychologists and schoolteachers who were recruited and trained within the framework of the project were responsible for conducting 'Unplugged'.

In addition, all the authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

**Acknowledgements:** We would like to express our gratitude to our colleagues from the Department of Addictology of the First Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in Prague for their methodological support. We thank the principals, teachers, psychologists, and students of the

three private schools in Tbilisi – "Iberia", "Leader", and "The XXI Century" – for their enthusiasm and support during the intervention and data collection periods.

**Role autori:** D. J. Javakhishvili and N. Javakhishvili navrhli danou studii, zpracovali její protokol, dohlíželi na její provádění a podíleli se na interpretaci dat. M. Miovský poskytl metodické vedení ve všech fázích výzkumného projektu. D. J. Javakhishvili rovněž vedla formativní workshopy, dohlížela na proces implementace programu „Unplugged“ a vypracovala prvotní verzi rukopisu studie. M. Razmadze a N. Kandelaki vedli polostrukturované rozhovory a ohniskové skupiny se studenty, vyučujícími a řediteli škol a zpracovali příslušná data. Všichni autoři se podíleli na přípravě rukopisu a schválili jeho finální podobu.

**Konflikt zájmů:** Vzhledem k jednoznačnému rozdělení rolí / účasti na výzkumu v rámci daného projektu nepředstavuje tato studie žádný konflikt zájmů. Výzkumný tým (autoři článku) měl na starosti design studie a její realizaci, zatímco psychologové a pedagogové příslušných škol byli v rámci projektu vybráni a vyškoleni pro realizaci metodiky „Unplugged“.

Všichni autoři současně prohlašují, že v souvislosti s touto studií nejsou v žádném konfliktu zájmů.

**Poděkování:** Rádi bychom vyjádřili svůj vděk našim kolegům z Kliniky adiktologie 1. LF UK za metodickou podporu. Děkujeme rovněž ředitelům, vyučujícím, psychologům a žákům tří tbiliských soukromých škol – „Iberia“, „Leader“ a „21. století“ – za jejich entuziasmus a podporu během realizace intervence i při sběru dat.

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