

SKILLS TO DEAL WITH THE RISK OF ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOURS AMONG VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

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BACKGROUND

The CRI Ribatejo Prevention Team bases intervention on the principles of effective prevention, safeguarding multi-component, continued, interactive and evaluated preventive interventions. This project of intervention based on life skills component to deal with the risk of addictive behaviours, of selective level, had the following objectives:

- Increase personal and social skills (assertiveness, communication skills, decision-making capacity, self-concept and vocational investment);
- Increase knowledge about alcohol and cannabis, by demystifying myths and associated beliefs;
- Increase the perception of risk and negative expectations and decrease positive expectations.

METHOD:

The project was developed in 2017/2018, during 12 dynamic and reflective sessions, with the time period of 120 minutes per session:

- nine sessions focused on personal and social skills development (assertiveness, emotional regulation, self concept, decision making and vocational investment);
- two sessions focused on providing information regarding alcohol and cannabis, with an interactive approach;
- last session was the evaluation session.

Was implemented by two prevention professionals, with the collaboration of the responsible teacher.

The protocol of outcome evaluation implied the application of a questionnaire, pre and post intervention, paired. The process evaluation was carried out with the students and teachers. The sample consists of 3 groups of alternative curriculum of vocational training of 2 professional Schools of Ribatejo, in a total of 53 students targeted for this project and 42 validated questionnaires (retention rate 79%).

In terms of gender, 76% are male.

The ages ranged from 15 to 19 years,

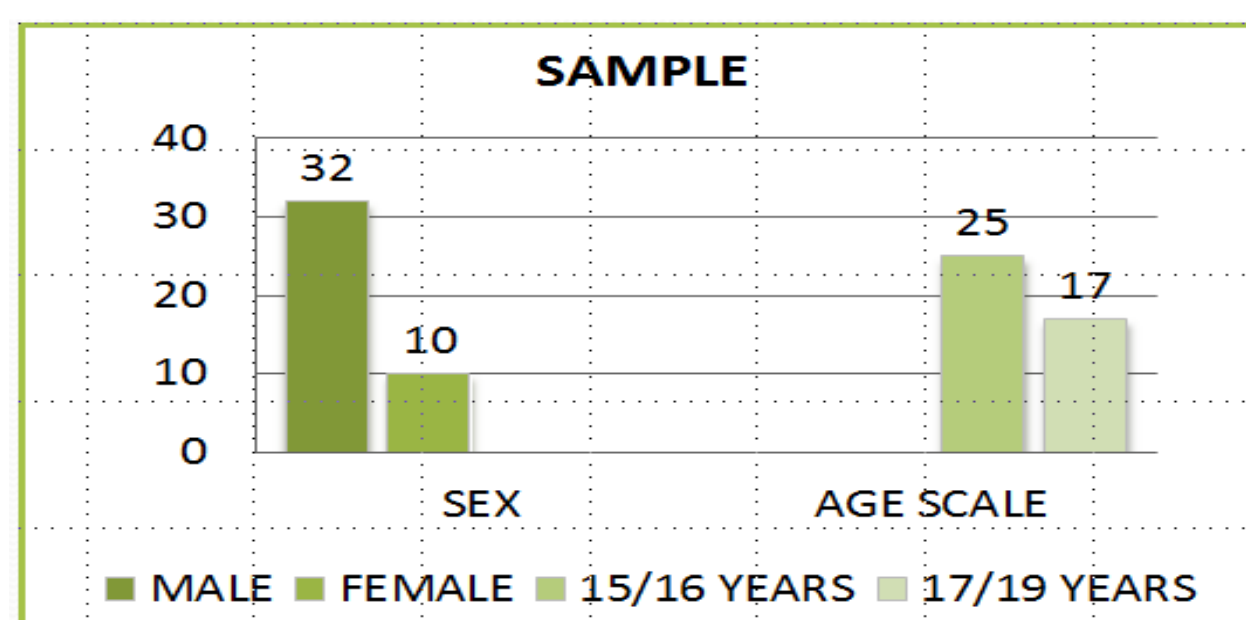
mean age 16.3 years, majority had

15/16 years. These students have low

academic expectations and had previously

failed in their studies. In relation to the use of

alcohol and other drugs, some of them experienced binge drinking (once a week) and/or used cannabis regularly (one smoke per day). Other risk factors identified were: low connection to school, low self esteem, low self-control and impulsivity, vulnerability to peer pressure.

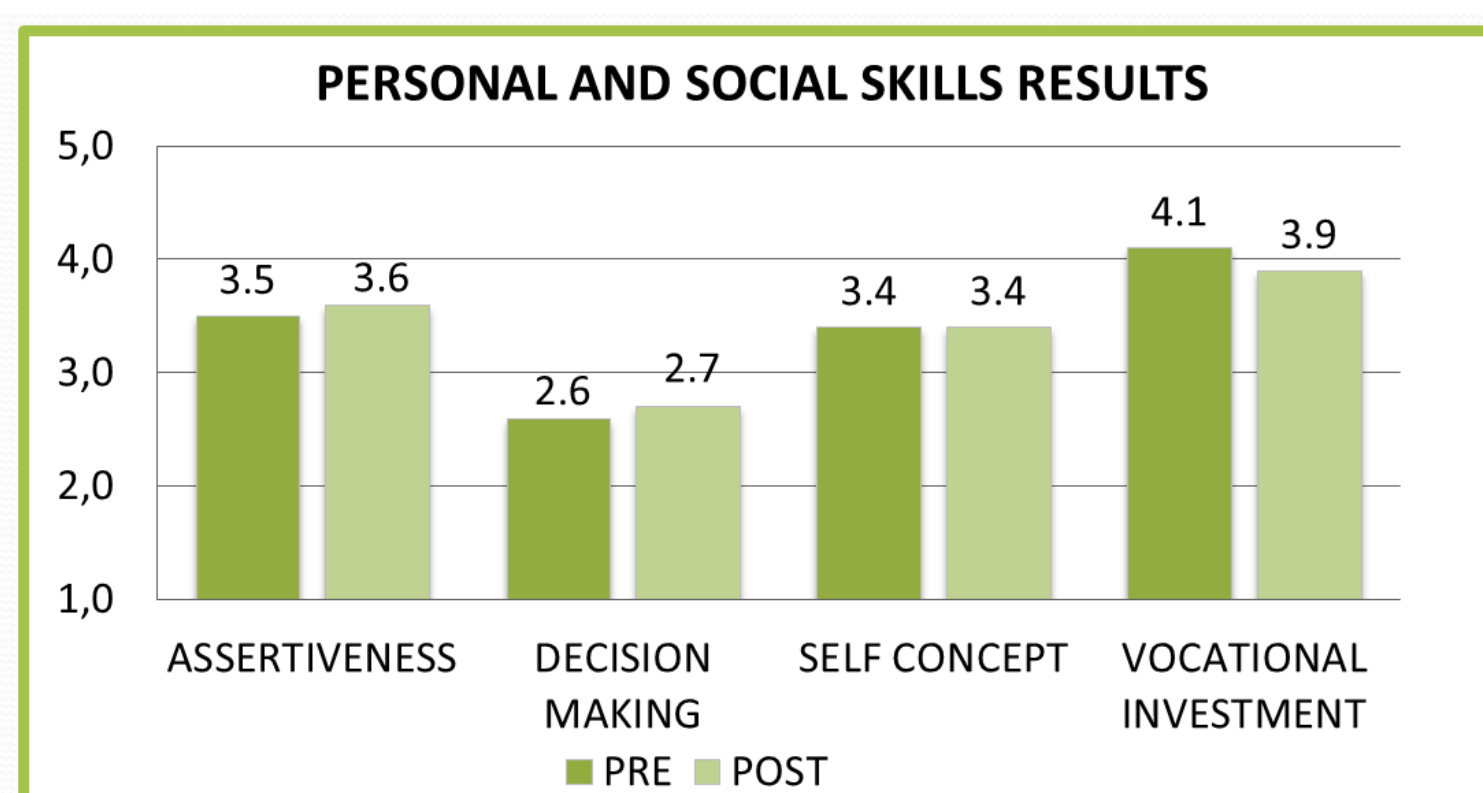


RESULTS:

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS - BY gender AND AGE SCALE

The analysis was based in four scales, all of them with a range of 5 points (totally disagree to 1 totally agree): Assertiveness - 5 items; Decision Making - 8 items; Self-Concept – 10 items; and Vocational Investment – 3 items. After the intervention, it was expected a mean increase in the 4 scales.

Overall, the mean has increased within assertiveness and decision making, but was maintained within self-concept and decreased within vocational investment (although with the highest mean, even in post data).



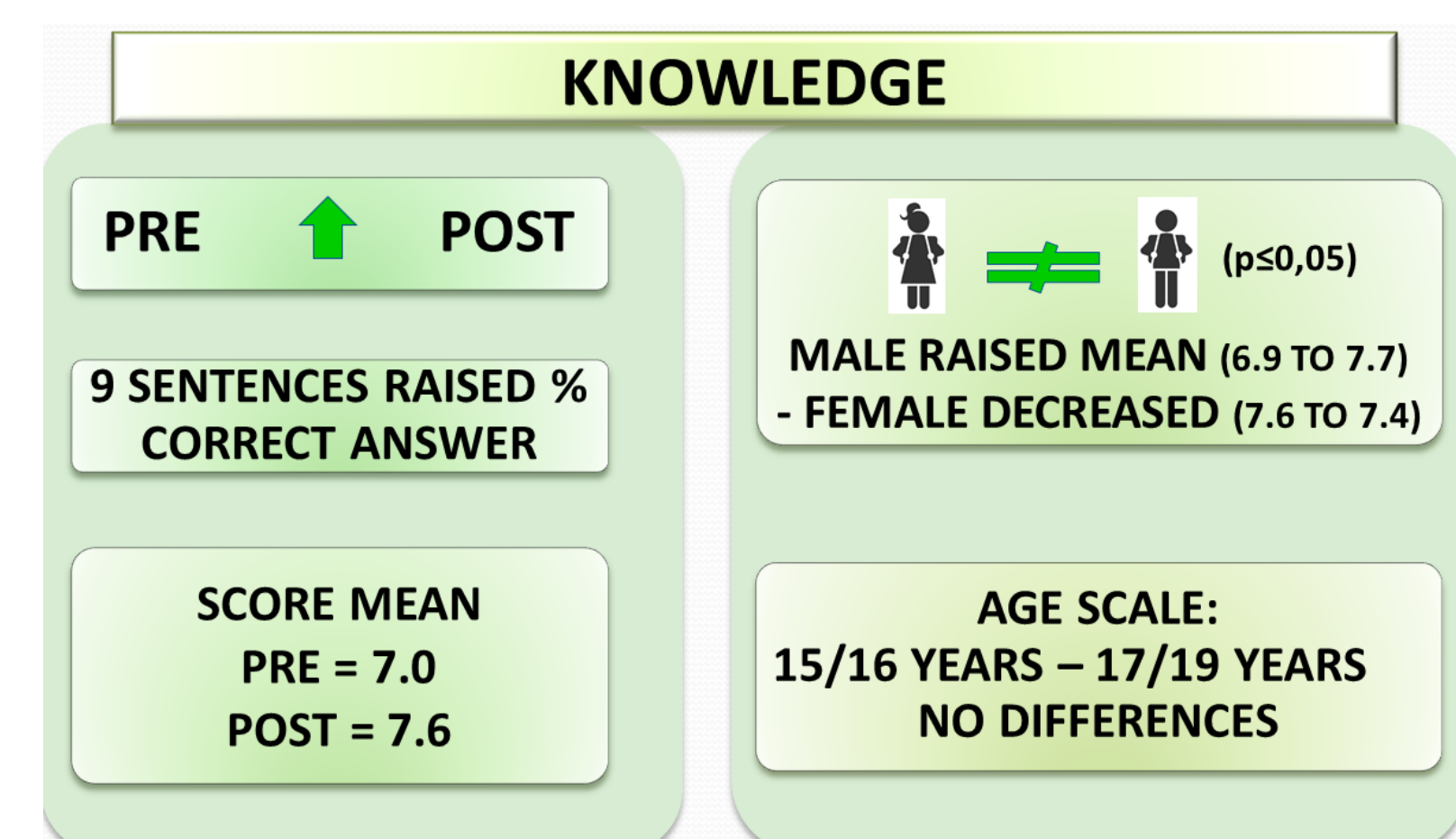
In terms of gender, female had a slight mean increase when compared to male regarding assertiveness, but this difference has no statistical significance. In the other scales there are no gender differences between pre and post analysis.

Regarding age scale, students of 17/19 years increase more than 15/16 years within decision making, with statistical significance ($p \leq 0,05$), and increased also within assertiveness and self concept, but difference has no statistical significance. In vocational investment scale, while students of 15/16 years decreased mean, 17/19 years maintained but, once again, has no statistical significance.

KNOWLEDGE – BY GENDER AND AGE SCALE

The analysis was based in a binary scale - true or false - with 13 items.

The evaluation analysis allowed to conclude that the students had a medium knowledge about psychoactive substances and although the average of correct answers in post intervention increased, had no significant difference.



In terms of gender, male increased more mean knowledge (correct answers) than female, with statistical significance.

Regarding age scale, students of 17/19 years (7.3 to 7.9) increase more than 15/16 years (6.9 to 7.4), but it has no statistical significance.

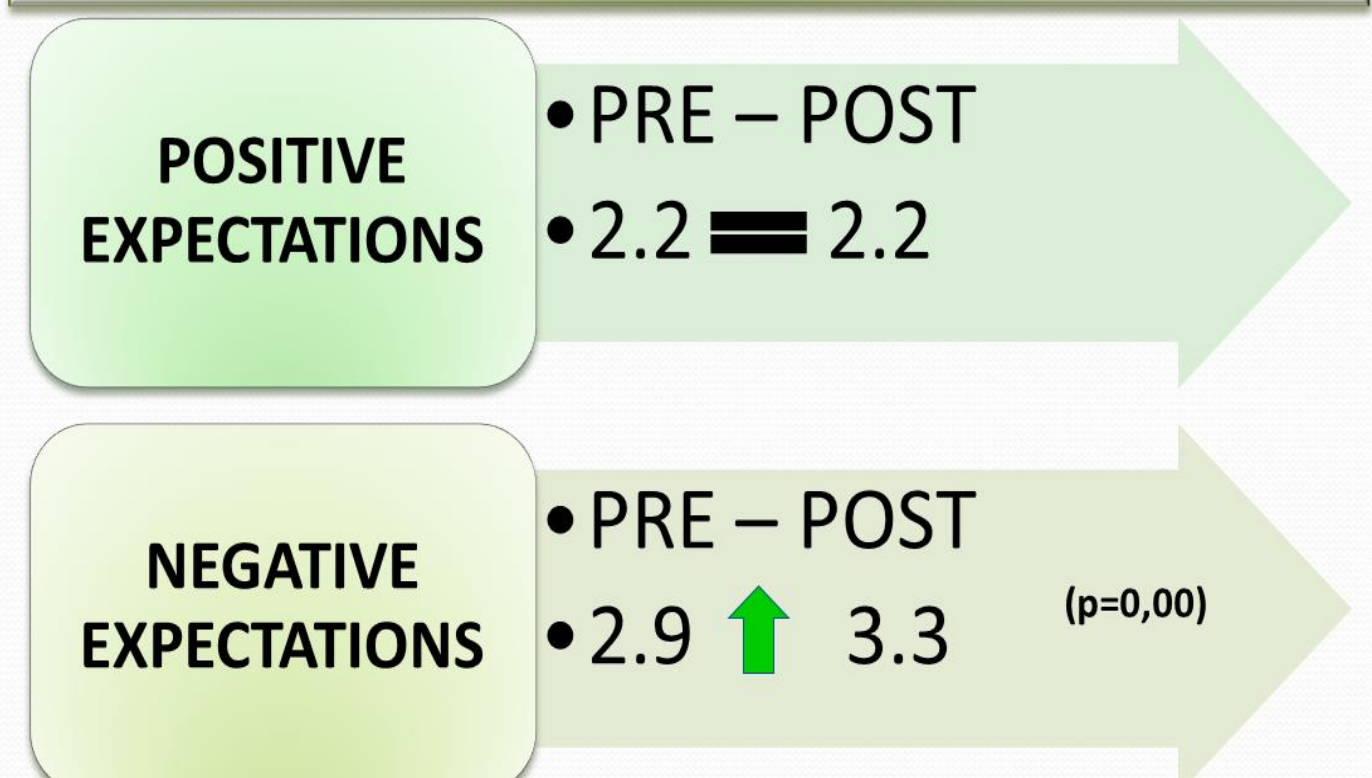
NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS IN REGARD TO USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES - BY GENDER AND AGE SCALE

The analysis was based in 13 items - 2 factors – positive expectations (7 items) and negative expectations (6 items), rating in a scale of 4 points (1 impossible and 4 very possible). These two dimensions allows us to understand attitudes towards the use of psychoactive substances. The lower positive expectations and the higher negative expectations, the lower the likelihood of trying and taking drugs.

The intervention did not allowed the positive expectations to be reduced, especially those related to interpersonal relationships, eg, being more popular, succeeding in relationships, having more friends (after intervention, it was expected a mean lower than 2). But on the other hand it decreased positive expectations related to self-perception of effects, eg, having more fun, feeling more relaxed, forgetting problems). There are no differences in gender and age scale.

In relation to negative expectations there was a mean increase, statistically significant. In terms of biological gender, both raise negative expectations, and males increase more, but there are no statistically significant differences between them. In terms of age scale, there is no statistically significant difference.

NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS



CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation of life skills projects to deal with the risk of addictive behaviours, among vulnerable young people, at a selective and indicated level, is still poorly studied and there is a need for further studies validated and adapted to these target groups.

In this intervention, the first challenge was to establish a relationship with the students, based on mutual trust, that allowed to implement a constructive and effective program. This kind of challenge it's higher in this target group, that has several risk factors associated and difficulty to connect with adults.

Even so, this experience increased personal and social skills such as assertiveness, and decision-making, and launches challenges to improve strategies to increase vocational investment, specially in the youngest students. At knowledge level, more focused and booster sessions are necessary. It's necessary to pay more attention towards the impact of the peers behaviour and internal pressure in order to lower positive expectations and increase risk perception.

In addition, this intervention increased interrelationship between prevention team, school, and student, but also at teachers/student level. In terms of impact evaluation, the application of the project allowed to promote the recognition of the problem regarding the use of substances within the students and the need to reduce frequency and/or stop consumption. That, culminated with the referral of two students to the indicated prevention response of Ribatejo CRI and three students to the school's psychological services.

Furthermore, we conclude that this intervention must be continued with students and make more longitudinal intervention and evaluation. In the future, it's important to make a quasi-experimental evaluation, more focused at vulnerable groups of young people in relation to the addictive behaviours. This should aim in the adaptation and creation of new methodologies not only to the target group but also for schools and families.

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