

# **Project MAP – Meaning-Centered Approach Drug Education and Counselling Programme**

## **Executive Summary**

In Hong Kong, the high relapse rate among substance abusers after treatment remains a significant problem. One of the important reasons leading to drug addiction, overlooked by many drug rehabilitation programmes, is the abusers' innate urge for meaning and purpose in life. Meaning-centered approach for drug addiction developed by psychologist Paul Wong is a comprehensive conceptual model to move beyond abstinence and harm reduction to personal reassurance with meaning in life. This study was granted by the Beat Drugs Fund to examine and validate the efficacy and feasibility of using Meaning-centered approach protocol for drug addiction of youth in Hong Kong. A mixed method with quantitative questionnaire survey and qualitative interview was adopted examining the significance of this approach in helping high-risk youth with (1) enhanced meaning and purpose in life, (2) enhanced mental wellness in terms of stress, depression, and anxiety, (3) increased social support and relationship with significant others in their lives, (4) enhanced sense of resilience in facing with life adversities, and (5) at the end with reduced risks in drug taking.

2,002 questionnaires were collected from the general youth after attending the drug education talks offered by the "Project MAP" – Meaning-Centered Approach Drug Education and Counselling Programme of The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups. 150 high-risk individuals of the drug prevention groups and 100 rehabilitating drug abusers of the treatment cases had completed the questionnaire survey three times at the pre, post and 3-month follow-up periods of the intervention. To triangulate the quantitative results, 15 high-risk individuals and 10 rehabilitating drug abusers were individually interviewed three times at different periods of the intervention.

Firstly, the descriptive results of this impact assessment revealed that the mean score of the general youth in the educational talks at the baseline measure were performing better than high-risk individuals and rehabilitating drug abusers in almost all the measured variables (such as purpose in life, depression, stress, social support from parents, teachers, classmates, best friends, resilience and drug attitudes) except anxiety and loneliness. The results called for a need to strengthen purpose in life in general youth, high risk individuals and rehabilitating drug abusers as all of their scores were still categorized as lack of clear meaning and purpose in life.

Secondly, repeated measures ANOVA revealed that changes of purpose in life among the high risk individuals and rehabilitating drug abusers immediately after the intervention and at the 3-month follow up periods were positive and statistically significant. This means that drug prevention and intervention with meaning-centered approach was effective in raising their purpose in life. This was also consistent with the qualitative results. On the one hand, high risk individuals expressed that the programme developed their meaning or purpose in life by assisting them to know more about their abilities, strengths, and identity. On the other hand, the rehabilitating drug abusers pointed out that the programme could guide them to explore their meaning in life and manage their life challenges. Furthermore, support from family was also found to be crucial as family support in proper ways could also inspire drug abusers and guide them through the problem of drug abuse in the long run.

Thirdly, meaning centered approach was found to have more appealing effects to raise drug prevention groups and individual treatment cases' purpose in life, perceived social support received from parents, and improved their stress level and drug attitudes when comparing to other treatment approaches (treatment as usual). The correlation analysis revealed that it is important to enhance young people's purpose in life as this can help strengthen their mental wellness and relationships with others. A clear purpose in life and better mental wellness in their everyday living can help prevent them to adopt a maladaptive coping mechanism (e.g. drug taking) to cover up their life challenges and life adversities.

This study had further explored the associations of the relationships among the measured variables through mediation and moderation analysis for the general youth in the educational talks, high risk individuals in the drug prevention groups, and rehabilitating drug abusers in the individual treatment cases. The results revealed that the important first step to prevent and reduce general youth's chance of drug taking is to raise and guide them to develop their purpose in life, which plays a direct and significant role to influence their attitude towards drugs and thus their drugs related behaviour. To lower general youth's permissive attitude towards drugs, it is important to handle their sense of loneliness with meaningful activities and quality support from parents. Among general youth, support from best friends was found as negative peer influence further affecting them to take drugs. Therefore, it is important to educate adolescents to make friends wisely and say no to drugs and negative influence from peers.

Apart from having clear purpose in life and quality support from parents, strong sense of resilience was equally important to reduce the effect of high risk individuals' drug attitude on their drug behaviour. High risk individuals might face with more diverse environments which may expose them to more life challenges and adversities. Therefore, enhancement of their purpose in life and resilience will be crucial and important to prevent and reduce their chance of drug taking. Quality support from parents and healthy mental wellness also play significant roles to mediate high risk individuals' attitude towards drugs and thus their drug related behaviour. Thus, to help high risk individuals overcome their life adversities so as to keep them away from drugs, strengthening their life resilience and providing high quality support from parents are crucial in the process.

When young people start moving onto the pathway of drug taking, their situations become more complicated. No significant factors can influence rehabilitating drug abusers' drug attitude and drug behaviour directly. In contrast, strong sense of loneliness plays significant role to influence their purpose in life and sense of resilience, in turn, affect their intention to quit drugs. With prolonged period of drug taking, they may become more socially isolated and lonely. As a result, drugs become their soulmates for receiving comfort and satisfaction to relieving their strong sense of loneliness. Therefore, to prevent young people from taking drugs, the most important first step is early prevention and intervention to help them make clear their purpose in life and strengthen their resilience in facing with life adversities.

Last but not least, this study recommends early prevention can be done at the junior secondary school level by offering high quality life education to guide young students to know themselves and clear their directions of development on the one hand. On the other hand, early prevention can also be done in the family level by offering quality parent education to support young people to develop their meaning in life, to plan and actualize their dreams, as well as to persist in achieving tasks and solving problems with healthy and positive mechanisms instead of using drugs maladaptively.