CURRICULUM FOR THE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF HELPLINE WORKERS ON NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)

Produced by the SKEPDAH
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The Skills and Knowledge Exchange Project for Drug and Alcohol Helplines is a European Union funded Erasmus +, Key Action 2 project. In 2016 research was done on Drug and Alcohol Helplines across Europe, identifying strengths and expertise as well as three key areas where skills and knowledge gaps existed. This project was designed to address these gaps in a manner that valued Continued Vocational Education and Training (C-VET) through both formal and informal learning. Partners were sought from both the Training and Helpline sector. Each partner was considered for what they might add to this project. This project comprises of 9 partner organisations, 8 Drug and Alcohol Helpline services and 1 Drug and Alcohol training organisation.

Learning outcomes for this project were identified and a plan was designed to meet, discuss and share on the three topics with the aim of developing a curriculum for each.

Three Transnational Exchange meetings were planned each to address one of the key areas of interest. The first meeting, looked at Helpline skills, with particular focus on burnout prevention. The second meeting looked at New Psychoactive Substances and the challenges they present for Helpline work. The third meeting looked at Co-occurring mental health and substance use issues and Helpline work.

To follow is the curriculum detailing for each learning outcome, some learning methods (What methods or learning approaches will support Helpline Workers to achieve the learning outcomes); some useful research on the topic; good practice and shared resources that support this work.

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Glossary of terms used in this document

- **Boundaries**: These are the limits, standards and parameters within which we work as professionals. Boundaries are there to make the interaction safe and keep the focus on the service users’ needs.

- **Caller**: A person who contacts a helpline service via phone, email, text etc.

- **Curriculum**: A list of the subjects comprising a course of study.

In the context of this project a curriculum refers to a list of topics that are most important in a subject area eg Burnout prevention. This curriculum details how competency or a learning outcome might be achieved on each topic, under the headings: Learning Method; Research on this; Good Practice in this area and Resources to be shared.

- **Learning outcome/ Competence**: This is what the Helpline Worker should know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a learning process.

- **EMCDDA**: The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

- **ESPAD**: The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs.

- **Reitox National Focal Points**: (Réseau Européen d’Information sur les Drogues et les Toxicomanies) The European Information network on drugs and drug addiction. Focal Points are currently in 28 EU Member States plus Norway and Turkey, the European Commission and the candidate countries.

- **New Psychoactive Substances**:

A new psychoactive substance is defined as ‘a new narcotic or psychotropic drug, in pure form or in preparation, that is not controlled by the United Nations drug conventions, but which may pose a public health threat comparable to that posed by substances listed in these conventions’ (ECMDDA).
Aims of this document

The purpose of this Curriculum is to outline the key elements that should be included in ongoing training and development on the topic of New Psychoactive Substances, for those involved in Helpline work, particularly Drug and Alcohol work.

The Curriculum aims to provide a framework, with supporting resources and ideas for good practice to:

- Raise awareness of NPS.
- Develop helpline workers confidence, knowledge and skills to effectively respond to NPS queries to the Helpline.

Target

This document is targeted at Helpline Coordinators/ Managers to help guide them in how to design learning and development resources for Helpline workers and volunteers. But it may be applicable to many other types of services.

Designing a learning and development plan

When designing any learning and development plan you will need to consider many factors such as:

1. Why the learning programme is needed
2. Your aim
3. The learning outcomes and benefits from the implementation of the programme
4. Description of the programme content/agenda
5. Target groups
6. Learning methods. What methods or learning approaches will support Helpline Workers to achieve the learning outcomes/competences? These could include:
   - Group learning: presentations; training activities – case studies, role play scenarios, quizzes etc., team meetings etc.
   - One-to-one learning: supervision, shadowing, peer support/mentoring etc.
   - Independent learning: reading, e-learning
7. The duration, context, place and time
8. Materials and equipment e.g. flipchart, projector, handouts, evaluation forms etc.
9. Reading and resources
10. Evaluation of how attendees experienced the learning activity and what was learned. This can be measured against the learning outcomes
11. Giving certificates that list the learning outcomes
12. Follow up evaluation to assess the impacts e.g. 3 -6 months after the learning activity.

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Learning Outcomes/Competences for New Psychoactive Substances and Helpline Work

In this curriculum we list 8 learning outcomes/competences. These were identified from our research in 2015 and again in 2016 at the start of the Skills and Knowledge Exchange Project for Drug and Alcohol Helplines (SKEPDAH) on learning needs across this partnership and also across the European Foundation of Drug Helplines (FESAT) Network. Learning Outcomes/ Competences are what the Helpline Worker should know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a learning process:

The learning outcomes/competences identified in this project’s work are:

1. Understand NPS as a continually changing phenomenon (in relation to the prevalence of use, why people use and the culture of use within your own country).
2. Understand NPS in relation to drug categories/groups (similarities and differences to ‘traditional drugs’ in relation to effects and harms).
3. Identify where to find up to date and accessible information on the effects and risks of the most commonly used NPS for both helpline workers and service users.
4. Understand the current law as it relates to NPS as it applies in your own country.
5. Identify prevention and harm-reduction approaches for NPS, when little is known about the risks.
6. Identify ways to ensure that helplines are seen as useful and relevant to individuals who use NPS, including diverse groups and hard to reach populations.
7. Understand best practice/protocols in responding to helpline calls relating to NPS.
8. Identify networks and supports on NPS, including other helplines.
To follow is the curriculum detailing for each learning outcome/competence, some research on the topic; ideas for good practice and shared resources that support this work:

1. **Learning Outcome/ Competence: Understand NPS as a continually changing phenomenon (in relation to the prevalence of use, effects of use, why people use and the culture of use within your own country)**

   **Learning Method**
   - **1.1.1** Team workshop/group exercises;
   - **1.1.2** Speakers presenting to the team;
   - **1.1.3** Subscribing and familiarizing the team about national and international blogs, fora, newsletters, research and reports.

   **Research on this**
   - **1.2.5** ESPAD (2015). Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. Retrieved from: [http://www.espad.org](http://www.espad.org)
   - **1.2.8** Purity, adulteration and price of drugs bought online versus offline in the Netherlands (2017) [https://www.gwern.net/docs/sr/2016-gouwe.pdf](https://www.gwern.net/docs/sr/2016-gouwe.pdf)
2. Learning Outcome/ Competence: To understand NPS in relation to drug categories/groups (similarities and differences to ‘traditional drugs’ in relation to effects and harms)

Learning Method

2.1.1 Team workshop/ group exercises;
2.1.2 Speakers presenting to the team;
2.1.3 Subscribing and familiarizing the team about national and international blogs, fora, newsletters, research and reports.

Research on this


Good practice to support this learning outcome

2.3.1 Share knowledge on NPS across the team (don’t just have one NPS expert).
2.3.2 Agree what categorisation you will use for NPS in your service, so that information can be recorded, organised and shared as well as possible. This might be guided by your National Reitox Focal Point and how they record the information.
2.3.3 Consider what harm reduction messages your helpline should use regarding NPS.
2.3.4 Consider the substance and classification of the substance by effect, rather than focusing too much on the chemicals involved etc.
2.3.5 Work to improve the teams’ confidence in dealing with this topic, particularly what’s similar and what’s different from ‘traditional drugs’.

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Resources shared during this project that support this learning outcome

2.4.1 The Drug wheel: http://www.thedrugswheel.com/


2.4.3 Websites of services which give examples of how we can communicate about NPS to our service users, such as:
   - Legal High Instalsstoffe: https://legal-high-inhaltsstoffe.de/de
   - Crew 2000 (Scotland): http://www.mycrew.org.uk
   - CHeckit (Austria): http://www.checkyourdrugs.at
   - DIMS: https://www.drugs-test.nl/


3. Learning Outcome/ Competence: Identify where to find up-to-date and accessible information on the risks and effects of the most commonly used NPS for both helpline workers and service users.

Learning Method

3.1.1 Team workshop/ group exercises;
3.1.2 Speakers presenting to the team;
3.1.3 Subscribing and familiarizing the team about national and international blogs, fora, newsletters, research and reports.

Research on this

3.2.1 Drug identification services such as:
   WEDINOS (Welsh Emerging Drugs and Identification of Novel Substances Project): http://www.wedinos.org/
   TICTAC Communications Ltd, London: http://www.tictac.org.uk/
3.2.2 University of Dundee, Centre for Excellence in New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) Research (opened 2017): http://www.lifesci.dundee.ac.uk/news/2017/jun/19/ddu-join-new-research-centre-focus-psychoactive-substances
3.2.3 EMCDDA Risk assessments http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/html.cfm/index16776EN.html

Good practice to support this learning outcome

3.3.1 Know where to refer people inquiring about NPS.
3.3.2 Keep all information up to date.
3.3.3 Disclaimer/caution about over-relying on the exact info and presuming that your tablet is the same and much is not known about the effects of specific NPS.
3.3.4 Access to the EMCDDA's Early Warning System (if available through your National Focal Point).

Resources shared during this project that support this learning outcome

3.4.1 Global Drug Survey (Adam Winstock): https://www.globaldrugsurvey.com/
   https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCwC_kDHfa5h7kF71t19TQ
3.4.2 User fora including:
   Erowid: https://www.erowid.org/
   Tripsit: http://drugs.tripsit.me/
   Bluelight http://www.bluelight.org/
3.4.3 The Drug Wheel: http://www.thedrugswheel.com/
4. Learning Outcome/ Competence: Understand the current law as it relates to NPS as it applies in your own country

Learning Methods

4.1.1 Team workshop/ group exercises;
4.1.2 Speakers presenting to the team;
4.1.3 Subscribing to and familiarizing the team with national and international blogs, fora, newsletters, research and reports.

Research on this


Good practice to support this learning outcome

4.3.1 To know the legal situation for your own and neighbouring countries.
4.3.2 To acknowledge that as new substances are being created all of the time, some will not yet have a clear legal standing.

Resources shared during this project that support this learning outcome

4.4.1 Knowledge of local laws.
4.4.2 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA): http://www.emcdda.europa.eu
4.4.3 EMCDDA, National Focal Points for countries in Europe: http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries_en
5. **Learning Outcome/ Competence: Identify prevention and harm-reduction approaches for NPS, when little is known about the risks**

**Learning Methods**

5.1.1 Team workshop/ group exercises;

5.1.2 Role-play;

5.1.3 Subscribing to and familiarizing the team with national and international blogs, fora, newsletters, research and reports.

**Research on this**


**Good practice to support this learning outcome**

5.3.1 Ethical considerations for NPS are key, due to how little is known and the changing nature of the topic.

5.3.2 For helpline workers to have the skills and confidence to communicate the limitations of knowledge available on NPS, particularly long term effects.

5.3.3 Consider and agree what harm reduction advice your helpline should give regarding NPS.

5.3.4 Give information about the features of NPS (such as variable strengths), alongside ‘harm reduction/minimization’ advice.

**Resources shared during this project that support this learning outcome**

5.4.1 Drug checking services; night-life, harm reduction projects, user fora:

- Erowid: [https://www.erowid.org/](https://www.erowid.org/)
- Tripsit: [http://drugs.tripsit.me/](http://drugs.tripsit.me/)
- Legal Highs Info Germany: [http://www.legal-high-inhaltsstoffe.de](http://www.legal-high-inhaltsstoffe.de)
- Ecstasy Data: [https://www.ecstasydata.org/](https://www.ecstasydata.org/)
- Safer Party: [http://www.saferparty.ch](http://www.saferparty.ch)
- The Loop: [https://wearetheloop.org/club-drug](https://wearetheloop.org/club-drug)
- Crew 2000: [http://www.mindaltering.co.uk/](http://www.mindaltering.co.uk/)
- Safer Night Life - New Net: Safernightlife.org


5.4.3 National resources, websites etc on this topic.
6. Learning Outcome/ Competence: Identify ways to ensure that helplines are seen as useful and relevant to individuals who use NPS, including diverse groups and hard to reach populations.

Learning Methods
6.1.1 Team workshop/ group exercises;
6.1.2 Speakers presenting to the team;
6.1.3 Subscribing to and familiarizing the team with national and international blogs, fora, newsletters, research and reports.

Research on this

Good practice to support this learning outcome
6.3.1. Consider creating online resources, if there is a discrepancy between the number of calls you are experiencing and your understanding of the prevalence of use of NPS.
6.3.2. Link with user fora and relevant social media to promote your helpline.
6.3.3. If available put a link to your service from national drug-testing services.

Resources shared during this project that support this learning outcome
6.4.1 Documents that support and inform on the needs of diverse groups (including LGBTQ; Ethnic minorities, homeless, people in prisons, young people etc.).
6.4.2 Terence Higgins Trust: https://www.fridaymonday.org.uk/
6.4.4 Overview of drug testing services: http://safernighlife.org/tedi
7. Learning Outcome/ Competence: Understand best practice/ protocols in responding to helpline calls relating to NPS

Learning Method

7.1.1 Team workshop/group exercises to develop and inform on best practice;
7.1.2 Role-play;
7.1.3 Subscribing to and familiarizing the team with national and international blogs, fora, newsletters, research and reports.

Research on this


Good practice to support this learning outcome

7.3.1 For Helplines to keep a database of what NPS come up on helpline calls, which relates to drug categories and symptoms effects and is continually updated.
7.3.2 To be aware of misinformation on the topic.
7.3.3 For helpline workers to be confident to say that knowledge in the area is limited.
7.3.4 To have guidance documents to support helpline workers to gain confidence on this topic.
7.3.5 Give information on characteristics (such as variable strengths).
7.3.6 Consider what harm reduction messages your helpline should use with regard to NPS.
7.3.7 Look at the ethical considerations of NPS, because of how little is known and the changing nature of the subject.
7.3.8 Respond to effects of the NPS rather than focusing on identifying the drug (it isn’t always possible to know what the caller has taken).
7.3.9 Use active listening skills as you would for any helpline call; to help caller identify what he/she wants from the call and to enable him/her to assess what steps are next in that quest.
7.3.10 Know where to refer people inquiring about NPS.
7.3.11 Look at research on this nationally and internationally.
7.3.12 Seek advice from other Drug and Alcohol Helplines and front-line services.

Resources shared during this project that support this learning outcome

7.4.2 FESAT (European Foundation of Drug Helplines) http://www.fesat.org

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8. Learning Outcome/ Competence: Identify networks and supports on NPS, including other helplines

Learning Methods

8.1.1 Team workshop/ group exercises;
8.1.2 Subscribing to and familiarising the team with national and international blogs, fora, newsletters, research and reports.

Good practice to support this learning outcome

8.3.1. Make sure know-how on NPS in your team is shared (avoid having only 1 expert; make sure you have back up).
8.3.2. Acknowledge the limitations of what you as a helpline worker and you as a helpline can do (refer to other sources; build a network of resources as a helpline).
8.3.3. Seek advice from other European Drug Alcohol Helplines.
8.3.4. Trans-European Drug Information project - TEDI: [http://safernightlife.org/tedi](http://safernightlife.org/tedi)

Resources shared during this project that support this learning outcome

8.4.2 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA): [www.emcdda.europa.eu](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu)
8.4.3 FESAT (European Foundation of Drug Helplines) [http://www.fesat.org](http://www.fesat.org)
For more information on 
‘The Skills and Knowledge Exchange Project 
for Drug & Alcohol Helplines’ (SKEPDAH) visit: 
www.fesat.org 
and 
for more information on 
Erasmus+ programme 
visit: 
www.ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus

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