

FERYA [Active and Networked Families] – A Program to Empower Family Organizations for Environmental Prevention and the Promotion of Preventive Rights

**NOBRE-SANDOVAL, L. A.¹, CASTAÑO, Y.^{1,2}, CALAFAT, A.¹, BECOÑA, E.³,
FERNÁNDEZ-HERMIDA, J. R.⁴, JUAN, M.¹**

1 | European Institute of Studies on Prevention, Palma, Spain.

2 | University of the Balearic Islands, Faculty of Psychology, Department of Psychology, Palma, Spain

3 | University of Santiago de Compostela, Faculty of Psychology, Department of Clinical Psychology and Psychobiology, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

4 | University of Oviedo, Faculty of Psychology, Department of Psychology, Oviedo, Spain

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Family involvement has proven to be a protective factor in childhood and adolescence, acting as a preventive barrier against risky behaviours, such as substance abuse and addiction, among minors and youth. Family- and community-based intervention strategies for environmental prevention have been deemed effective; however, empirical data is scarce. The study aims to provide a conceptualised framework for the FERYA program (*Networked and Active Families*), a bottom-up environmental prevention program running in Spain since 2012 (known as EPOPS – *Empowering Parents Organizations to Prevent Substance use* at EU level). FERYA integrates community- and family-based approaches to prevent risk behaviours among youth by changing intervention paradigms from individual to community and environmental perspectives, especially aimed at leisure. For this purpose, the program focuses

on the empowerment of Family Organisations (FOs) as leaders in prevention efforts within a larger community-based stakeholder system. This study provides an overview of FERYA's conceptual framework and outlines its development in Spain. It addresses the risk and protective factors identified during the intervention and its scope, the difficulties encountered during implementation, and the role of families in advocating for evidence-based prevention and promotion of their preventive rights. A Logic Model framework highlights the main variables in the planning process (i.e. resources, activities, products, results, and other related variables). Finally, this study addresses the importance of measuring the long-term outcomes of the program while considering contemporary socialisation modes, such as digital technologies, when planning environmental prevention strategies targeting the youth.

Keywords | Family Prevention – Community-Based Prevention – Parent Association – Environmental Prevention – Family Empowerment – Leisure – Advocacy – Family Organizations

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Corresponding author | Yasmina, Castaño, European Institute of Studies on Prevention (IREFREA), Rambla, 15 (2-3), 07003 Palma, Spain.

ycastano@irefrea.org

1 INTRODUCTION

Concerns about the health, safety, education, and happiness of their children are major drivers for families to take action. However, these concerns are not sufficient to motivate families to engage in preventive strategies and harness the benefits of family-based prevention (UNODC, 2015).

Prevention programs targeting substance abuse in minors have progressively involved families as a key factor in the success of such interventions. However, studies have addressed several challenges regarding their feasibility and effectiveness. These challenges include allocating adequate timing for involving families in programs, finding effective ways to encourage family participation, striking a balance between theoretical and overall program principles, and the successful implementation of programs at a local level (Al-Halabi et al., 2006; Israelashvili, 2019). Consequently, this area of prevention programs are often undermined by low participation (Al-Halabi et al., 2006; Negreiros de Carvalho et al., 2021) and require a more sophisticated implementation infrastructure to involve targeted stakeholders as part of a community-based prevention system.

Research suggests that families that engage in preventive programs tend to be more committed and that universal strategies often fail to reach populations most in need of prevention (Al-Halabi et al., 2006). Promoting normative changes in parental attitudes also remains a challenge, despite strong evidence demonstrating that shifting normative beliefs may impact behavioural change (Percy et al., 2019). Although theory supports the importance of families as major socialisation agents, studies of family-based interventions are not sufficiently consistent regarding their applicability to other populations and settings or in terms of their use in meaningful public health outcomes (Fernandez-Hermida et al., 2012). Previous studies have pointed out that increased parents' knowledge about their children's engagement in risky behaviours (e.g. substance use) is related to a higher involvement of those parents in family prevention programs and higher proactive behaviour against the risky attitudes of their children (Fernandez-Hermida et al., 2013). The identification of the above-mentioned difficulties encountered in prevention programs suggest that research on family-based perspectives must evolve further. According to our experience, an interesting starting point is to shift the role of families from passive recipients of programs that benefit from preventive advice to active agents who take part in the decision-making process and take leadership in locally based preventive actions. When families take ownership of and adopt strategic positions to influence decision-making, they are more likely to become powerful stakeholders capable of pioneering evidence-based prevention and advocating comprehensive prevention systems that benefit community groups at the local level. However, achieving this transformation requires the integration of new approaches, including implementing literacy on prevention, guaranteeing the empowerment of family organisations, development of their leadership and advocacy skills, and a shift away from the perspective that tackles issues within the context of risk, no longer focusing on individual (or family) behaviour but rather on the systems in which these individuals are embedded (Chater & Loewenstein, 2023).

Despite the journey of community-based prevention strategies over the past few decades, many prevention programs have been implemented with scarce evidence of their effectiveness (Miovsky et al., 2022). Recent research supports the importance of involving organised social groups, particularly Family Organizations (FOs), in transforming local environments (Biglan et al., 2012). Indeed, prevention experts emphasise the importance of civil society participation in addressing structural and environmental risk factors, particularly in creating environments conducive to healthy leisure activities (Biglan et al., 2012). Following Saskia Sassen's model of the global city (Sassen, 2015), when analysing the current globalisation process, we find a new form of governance in which success depends on the quality and content of the decision-making processes, where civil society plays an important role.

FOs are associations of families that work in a structured manner as part of a civil society and aim to promote social change in fields linked to children's needs related to health, leisure, sports, safety, and education (Guerrero et al., 2019). However, there is limited research on how families are organised as a civil society group and the impact of their actions on their environments.

The *Familias en Red y Activas* [Networked and Active Families] (FERYA) program, running in Spain since 2012, was conceived as a comprehensive intervention on *environmental prevention* and community-led *promotion of preventive rights (advocacy)* (Becoña et al., 2013; Burkhart et al., 2022; Oncioiu et al., 2018). Its core objective is to empower FOs and foster commitment through the development of leadership so that they are supported in initiating coordinated actions that impact family environments, especially leisure. Indeed, the intervention is designed by and for FOs focusing on the risks young people are exposed to, such as addictive behaviours related to substance abuse and other addictions such as gambling. The program has its foundations in the *European Family Empowerment [EFE]* project (Calafat et al., 2014; Gabrhelík et al., 2014), which was conducted in six EU countries from 2010 to 2012. This project aimed to investigate how different parenting styles affect risky behaviours in adolescents, considering the participation of FOs as a major component of the intervention.

FERYA is based on several principles underlying its overall approach: (1) families care about their children and therefore, are willing to take action; (2) families are the most committed groups towards child well-being; (3) the various risks that impact young people's lives and could lead to addictive behaviours are interconnected, so as the protective factors and preventive solutions that could be envisaged to prevent these risks; (4) owing to the multiple problems that appear in adolescence, prevention is one of the most effective, edifying, and constructive strategies to face them; (5) citizens are capable of leading major social changes and acting in collaborative networks; (6) effective and lasting prevention must go beyond strategies focused only on individuals or individual families (parenting styles, development of life skills) and should also aim at generating changes in the social context where risks emerge; (7) leisure is central to preventive strategies, because it is where many risks appear and where solutions can be focused, as leisure is a human need that is essential to learning life experiences (Juan et al., 2015).

2 THE FERYA PROGRAM IN SPAIN

Adolescents and young adults in Spain and across Europe face a pressing need for preventive action against substance abuse and addiction. Indeed, the Survey on Drug Use in Secondary Schools in Spain 1994–2023 – ESTUDES 2023 (OEDA, 2023), showed that alcohol is the most widely consumed psychoactive substance among students aged 14–18 years in Spain; 56.6% had consumed alcohol 30 days prior to the survey. Over the same period, 28.2% of students reported engaging in binge drinking and 20.8% reported having been drunk. In the same age group, 7.5% of students reported daily smoking and 15.6% reported cannabis use 30 days prior to the survey.

Given this reality, FERYA supports families' commitment to the education and well-being of their children, recognising this commitment as a dynamic and important predictor of preventive action (Coatsworth et al., 2019). Commitment is a key component of the program because the most proactive people in FOs are usually those who invest in seeking better conditions for their children. Consequently, FOs are the primary targets of the program, as they are more likely to 'spread' prevention efforts in their sphere of influence, understand its importance, and be empowered to take action (Centola, 2018).

However, the FERYA program is not designed exclusively for FOs involved in education; it also targets relevant stakeholders operating in cross-cutting sectors such as health, leisure, and social welfare. Generally, representatives of different types of FOs demonstrate participatory habits and strategic thinking when faced with community problems. Therefore, ensuring the continuity of this cross-sectorial network of local stakeholders is the key to building collective and local knowledge that may impact social transformations at the local level (Centola, 2018).

FERYA aims to strengthen the FOs capacity to advocate for preventive rights and assume leadership roles in decision-making processes related to social policies. Essentially, families are encouraged to act as organised *advocacy* for evidence-based prevention. Moreover, it encourages them to take action to develop quality prevention systems in their municipalities based on scientific evidence and to generate social and cultural (environmental and structural) impacts for the benefit of minors in the area.

FERYA is not only a 'preventive program', but it is also a 'strategy for risk prevention'; from now both terms will be used. The term 'strategy' will be used to emphasise the comprehensive and proactive nature of FERYA's approach to risk prevention, while 'program' will be used interchangeably, particularly in contexts where brevity is necessary or when referring to specific components or initiatives within FERYA. Drawing from Mintzberg et al.'s (2003) proposal for 'strategy process', the FERYA is conceptualised as a set of planned actions which require (and support) collective and informed decision making in a dynamic manner, including concrete measures aimed at achieving one or several prevention objectives. The sustainability of FERYA is based on synergies among three main entities: (1) FOs, who lead the actions; (2) a team of prevention professionals who provide scientific evidence, technical advice, and training; and (3) national, regional, or local adminis-

trations working in related sectors (health, education, youth), providing infrastructure for actions, institutional support, and occasionally, financial assistance. Local administrations often benefit from the FERYA network and serve as a bridge for decision-makers responsible for local policy planning and regulations. The network also includes representatives of civil society. Overall, FERYA is an organic prevention strategy based on stakeholder connections within community-based networks. It builds on cooperation and alliances between collectives, with the goal of establishing community-based networks and promoting social change in local environments.

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 FERYA's underlying theories

The preventive strategy proposed by FERYA aims to create lasting environmental and paradigmatic changes at the individual, organizational, and community levels. Therefore, the theoretical structure is complex. It includes key elements from various sociological theories that generate a comprehensive set of interconnected actions included in the program (*Table 1*).

The FERYA model integrates each of the above-mentioned paradigms, as one of the key points of the program is to place FOs at the centre of their leisure environments. Because children's protection is linked to how these local environments are managed, it is essential to promote and facilitate the empowerment of FOs and other agents in their networks of influence. This can be achieved by teaching prevention literacy, encouraging accessibility to valuable leisure offers (see definition in *Table 1*), and learning to work in a synergistic and coordinated manner among the concerned stakeholders.

3.2 Risk and protective factors

FERYA focuses on different risk and protective factors in various territories, leading to objectives and results tailored to each context. However, some of these factors are considered key elements that should be included in all implementation phases, including program evaluations (*Table 2*).

3.3 Problems and objectives

The problems that FERYA intends to address are systemic and can be grouped into three organizational levels.

(1) At the intra-organizational level, the aim is to build the capacity of network members to improve internal management skills to reach their goals. For example, digital technology can be used to develop a strategic vision and planning objectives. Therefore, they benefit from support to enhance their potential, improve their health and prevention literacy, and develop community-based actions, whether preventive or otherwise.

(2) At the inter-organizational level, FOs are encouraged to strengthen their networks with other FOs, with the education-

Table 1 | Conceptual framework of the FERYA program

Theory	Application in the FERYA Model
1. Organizational and community empowerment (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004)	Empowerment of FOs at different levels (intra-organizational, inter-organizational, and extra-organizational) through reinforcing skills of their members and broadening their scope of influence through the insertion of prevention as a central strategic objective activated by FERYA. Developing the capacity to learn (and teach) to lead actions, in a network, with a preventive, contextual (environmental), and community vision. Developing skills, the ability to question established myths, and a greater awareness of reality and context.
2. Social development model (Catalano & Hawkins, 1966)	The way FERYA is designed aims to create changes in the links established between families and their communities, to provide more pro-social and protective models of action, to develop not only individuals, but also organizations and communities with preventive values and, additionally, to allow the emergence of valuable leisure as a new model.
3. Systemic ecological model (Anderson et al., 2013)	Families are a system connected to a community network and its sphere of influence. Increasing the management capacity of FOs in their network (intra-, inter-, and extra-organizational) during preventive actions will contribute to transforming their environment. FERYA acts as an environmental prevention strategy (Burkhart et al., 2022), as it empowers and supports FOs to generate changes in their systems, to achieve relevant changes in the contexts to make them protective, beyond the “conscious” behaviors and decisions of individuals.
4. Systemic-cybernetic paradigm (Bateson, 1972)	
5. Ecosystem model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)	The active components of FERYA are aimed at the interactions (and actions) of individuals with the various levels in the system in which they interact, in order to generate changes in all its “layers”, from the most internal, the family; to the most external, the culture regarding prevention and leisure.
6. Valuable leisure (Miguel, 2020)	It is about an edifying, diverse model of leisure, with many different formats of leisure-time activities. Leisure experiences are no longer addressed with a focus on a culture of consumption. Instead, the focus is on leisure experiences guided by ethical values, with positive connotations and capable of respecting individual identity, while allowing collective expression.
7. Public health literacy (Freedman et al., 2009)	Promote prevention (and health) literacy so that representatives of family organizations can accomplish, process, understand, evaluate, and act in a manner that promotes the preventive rights of minors and the entire community. Their continuous and shared learning outcomes impact the implementation of evidence-based preventive actions with outreach to families in the community.

al community or professionals with whom they interact, and with community stakeholders who provide them with information and resource access. At this level, FOs benefit from training to help them identify support networks, and thus broaden their scope of action.

(3) At the extra-organizational level, the most complex level, organisations must design a dissemination plan that goes beyond the families’ scope, advocate for entry into decision-making spheres related to the social policies that concern them, and promote preventive transformations in their environments of influence.

The three preventive objectives proposed for FOs participating in the FERYA (*Figure 1*) are as follows: (1) prevention of alcohol consumption among minors as a first step to prevent broader forms of addiction in leisure environments; (2) increased connections between FOs so that they can collaborate in prevention plans; and (3) development of community actions aimed at transforming contexts and environments to foster diversified styles of leisure that promote health and create individual and community skills.

3.4 Logic model framework

FERYA is conceived as a tailored strategy as it adapts its specific preventive objectives and expected results to the concrete context of intervention. It is therefore relevant to consider its Logic Model framework (McLaughlin et al., 2010) to assess throughout implementation and evaluate whether activities

and outputs help achieve the expected results of the program or whether program fidelity has been reduced because of too many adjustments during implementation. In this regard, activities do not fall under FERYA if there is no clear involvement of families in the organisation and planning of actions (leadership and benefits). To be considered part of the FERYA prevention strategy, activities need to be conducted in an interconnected manner within a network that encourages the participation of different community stakeholders. To become a preventive action and be included in FERYA, the protection of minors must be at the core of the participants’ motivation, as the purpose of the program is to empower FOs and place them at the centre of their community strategies.

Figure 1 shows a graphical representation of the program described in the following section.

4 PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

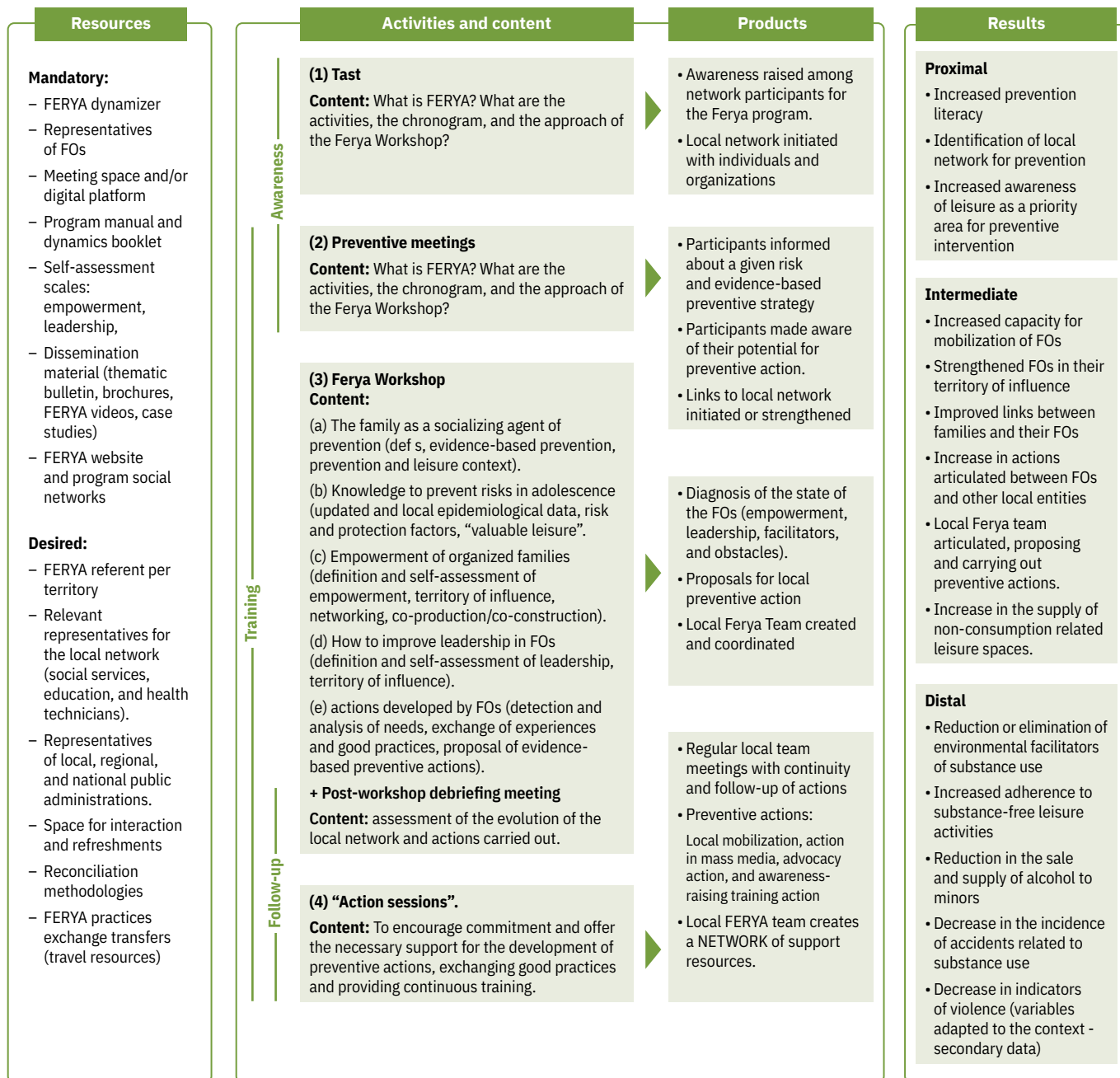
The program was developed in three main components that feed on each other and are part of a continuous evaluation process: (1) awareness-raising, (2) training, and (3) follow-up.

It is led by local coalitions composed of (a) heads of FOs, (b) local administrations, and (c) prevention professionals trained in the program.

Figure 1 | Logistic model of the active and networked families (FERYA) prevention strategy

The purpose of FERYA is to empower family organizations (FOs) to have prevention as part of their strategies.

<p>Problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low prevention literacy • Leisure models centered on substance use • Low organizational capacity of local networks to act on leisure contexts 	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention of underage drinking, especially in the context of leisure. • To increase the actions of FAMILY ORGANIZATIONS in PREVENTION, to reduce the risk of addictions in minors. • To increase network actions aimed at promoting healthy environments and leisure styles. 	<p>Target population: representatives of FOs</p> <p>Beneficiary population: Minors from the entire community</p>
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Implementation aspects

FERYA can only be implemented in communities where there are FOs. It is a highly adaptable strategy, allowing adjustments in order, duration, and content, with activities conducted in a non-linear way to meet the needs of the adopting group. The core elements include networking, empowerment of FOs, support for commitment and leadership development, family-led, community and environmental-based prevention actions, and leisure as a priority context for preventive action.

Table 2 | Target risk and protective factors promoted as part of the FERYA strategy

Risk factors			
<i>Leisure environment</i>	<i>Family organizations</i>	<i>Families</i>	<i>Young people</i>
Lack of resources and valuable leisure alternatives	Weakened family organizations	Families that have 'normalized' the consumption of alcohol and other drugs as an inherent part of leisure time.	Substance-using leisure as main activity
Hegemonic model of leisure linked to the consumption of addictive substances	Representatives committed to the interests of other groups than families.	Families that do not see relevance of managing children's leisure activities.	Low participation in valuable leisure alternatives
Easy access to substances	Lack of leadership and vision	Families distancing themselves from the organizations that represent them	Regular intensive use of substances and digital technologies
Alcohol promotion and visibility	Low capacity to act as a network and to influence its environment		
Protective factors			
<i>Leisure environment</i>	<i>Family organizations</i>	<i>Families</i>	<i>Young people</i>
Accessible and diversified resources and facilities for leisure activities unassociated to addictive consumption	FOs that collaborate with other organizations in their community	Families committed to managing their children's leisure time and willing to learn about prevention	Development of forms of social participation
Diversity of daytime spaces for youth socialization	Institutional support, and support from professional groups to develop the capacity FOs	Non-tolerant attitude towards underage consumption	Development of critical thinking
Making it easier to choose a healthy and valuable activity over consuming.	FOs representatives committed to prevention	Vicarious commitment (parents are role models): – Low parental consumption – Social involvement with other organizations – Attention to friends and their families	Interest in direct/active community participation
Clear and enforced regulations	Own desig of an empowerment and sustainability plan		Digital competencies oriented to the development of social capital with civic values.
Limitation (and/or prohibition) of advertising, promotions or visibility of substance use.	Increased number of parents/families affiliated to the FOs		Leisure competencies that incorporate learning of social, emotional, and civic skills.

Raising awareness is necessary to activate local networks and integrate the FERYA program into a specific territory. Capacity-building activities are the highlights of this program. Training is conducted through workshops for members of local teams, especially those responsible for FOs, which will lead to subsequent actions. Most of the central components of the program are presented during the workshops. A follow-up workshop helps provide continuity in the relationships among the participant groups. The network remains active throughout these follow-up sessions, which can also take the form of training.

It is essential to understand the dynamic and organic nature of FERYA throughout its application and during the process of training families to reinforce their leadership skills. During workshops and meetings, parents propose objectives and preventive actions tailored to their contexts and needs. The role of prevention specialists is to translate and facilitate the science of prevention to local teams in a pedagogical and practical manner according to their demands and needs. The dynamic components of the program include promoting networked activities led by families and encouraging actions that become a

'product' of the FERYA teams. The results address local mobilisation, contributions to the development of local regulations and their enforcement, actions to advocate for evidence-based prevention, and promoting visibility in the media to impact the broader family environment. Related achievements, such as reducing opportunities for addictive consumption among minors and promoting healthy and valuable leisure for the entire community, are interlinked results that constitute the general objectives of the program beyond the scope of FOs.

The immediate expected results following the implementation of FERYA are (a) an increase in prevention literacy in the local network, (b) the creation of a sensitised and committed network for the promotion of prevention actions, and (c) an increase in awareness of leisure as a priority area for preventive interventions.

As intermediate results, it is expected that (a) the representatives of FOs will be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their entities and manage them to assume a leadership role in the actions of the local FERYA teams; (b) they will feel com-

mitted, capable, and responsible for leading changes in their environment, thus achieving that network; (c) they will develop their mobilisation capacity by acting in an articulated manner; and (d) they will increase opportunities for valuable leisure in the community.

In the long-term, once the entire strategy is articulated and the community assumes the protection of young people, the following is expected: (a) greater participation of FOs in decision-making spaces for the reduction or elimination of environmental facilitators of alcohol (and other substances) consumption; (b) FOs are considered key social agents in spaces of valuable leisure management and support to youth organizations; (c) a decrease in the sale and supply of alcohol to minors; (d) a decrease in incidences related to substance abuse; and (e) a decrease in the indicators of violence (risky sexual behaviours, social isolation, and abusive use of digital technologies).

5 DISCUSSION

Following the lead in which other prevention strategies outline their efforts on paper (Miovsky, 2015), the current work provides guidelines to comprehensively understand the development of the FERYA strategy (Miovsky, 2015). Addiction represents a challenge for prevention science and social policies in contemporary societies. Tackling the problem of addiction in the 21st century requires rethinking models and theoretical frameworks, and gaining a better understanding of the various dynamic factors involved. Social trends change continuously and affect behaviour and addiction. Additionally, there is a need to address predictable future issues, such as the risks associated with digital technologies, the possible negative consequences associated with biotechnology, the unpredictable effects of artificial intelligence, and so on. These contemporary changes in socialisation modes will certainly affect the youth (UNODRR, 2019) and cause new prevention concerns.

Families always need a space to develop skills and learn about the relevant aspects of parenting related to the ever-changing environment in which their children interact. However, to achieve impacts in preventing risk factors for minors and youth, families need to take an active, leading role in the places and spheres in which decisions are made. Therefore, effective prevention requires an environmental component that involves the creation of safe and healthy environments in addition to valuable leisure offers aimed at providing an edifying leisure model for them (Burkhart et al., 2022).

In terms of limitations, some parallelisms can be found between the FERYA strategy and previous research, such as the projects undertaken by Miovsky and Gabrhelik (2015) to develop an Integrated System of School-based Prevention. One of the main obstacles in the implementation process is the difficulty in conveying complexities to all interested parties across the community. The other is the design of existing infrastructures, often bound to act according to their own protocols in a compartmentalised manner, rather than working as a network. However, part of what FERYA aims to achieve is overcoming these issues by empowering FOs.

Acting to improve community investment in youth well-being as a guarantee of sustainable futures requires tailored conceptual frameworks and tools provided by organizational and social sciences. It also requires strong governance systems that understand the importance of prevention with a focus on community-based social changes. Specifically, the phenomenon of addiction requires systemic, participatory, and multi-disciplinary treatment given its ever-changing, multi-faceted, and uncertain nature. For further information on the module structure, please check pages 52–54 of the FERYA Handbook.

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