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Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena



Profile

Center for Applied Developmental Science, Friedrich Schiller University of Jena

The Center for Applied Developmental Science (CADS) aims at advancing knowledge and methods of developmental science, an interdisciplinary field of research, which has been developed primarily by psychologists and sociologists. Developmental science examines the development of human behavior and experience across the life span from an interdisciplinary perspective. Positive development as well as behavioral maladjustment in children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly can only be understood in relation to the successful or unsuccessful achievement of age-typical developmental tasks in family, school, leisure, or the public sphere.

Psychosocial competencies for regulating affect, motivation, cognition, and action develop through the mutual interplay of biological, psychological, and socio-ecological conditions, which in principle are open to change across the life span and can therefore be influenced by prevention and intervention. In light of the complexity of human development and its influences, effective means to optimize positive and to minimize negative developmental trajectories have to address the individual as well as proximal (primary socialization contexts such as the family) and the distal environment (work place, community, culture).

To be engaged in applied developmental science means to derive and to apply scientific knowledge in a special way. First, we aim to disseminate theoretically-based and empirically grounded knowledge on biopsychosocial development. Due to the complexity of developmental influences (biological, social, cultural, historical) it is often not possible to trust existing empirical findings. Thus, own innovative research projects are needed that take particular consideration of the political and societal situation in Germany and Europe. Following this findings are analyzed regarding their potential to stimulate defining goals and means for prevention and intervention regarding developmental processes. As in other behavioral sciences we face profound deficits here because previous research was often conducted detached from real social problems, such as the threatened integration of the second generation of immigrations or the lack of responsibility and civic engagement among adolescents.

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In addition, the public tends to be satisfied with pseudoscientific causal explanations and thus, available means of interventions. Finally, in order to apply this knowledge close collaboration with representatives and institutions in public policy and with program managers in charge of planning and implementation on the other hand is needed.

The general aim of CADS is to disseminate knowledge on psychosocial development across the life span and to highlight its relevance for optimizing adaptive development and preventing or intervening in the face of maladaptive development. The target group consists of leading experts in science, politics, and application as well as young professionals from these fields. The CADS offers a wide array of research, consultation, as well as education opportunities.

Numerous own innovative research programs on human development at the CADS are the foundation of its work, which are, of course, closely embedded in the international community. Based on this, new model programs for prevention and intervention are being developed, implemented, and evaluated regarding their effectiveness and success. In contrast to previous approaches that concentrate on avoiding or reducing deficits in psychosocial adaptation the focus is on alternatives to further potentials for positive development (initiative, agency, intrinsic motivation, optimism) that are always present.

In addition, we offer consultations regarding the planning and evaluation of prevention and intervention programs in the fields of youth delinquency, substance use, violence in school and leisure, integration of migrants, entrepreneurial potentials, and civic engagement.

Besides education and training in Applied Developmental Science for affiliates of social professions CADS hosts an international education program "Human Development in Context" supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), which is offered by psychology departments from Jena and Pennsylvania State University (University Park, USA). In collaboration with the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development (ISSBD) and other professional organizations, and with financial support from other foundations workshops are being organized on themes, such as „Positive Development: Linking Individuals, Communities, and Social Policies“ in Weimar (Germany) or „Self-regulation and Social Change“ in Moscow (Russia).

The director of CADS is Professor Rainer K. Silbereisen (Department of Developmental Psychology and Pennsylvania State University) supported by an international advisory board, which consists of Professor Richard Lerner (Tufts University, Boston, USA), Professor Christiane Spiel (University of Vienna, Austria), and Professor Wolfgang Schneider (University of Würzburg, Germany). CADS collaborates with research groups in the USA, Italy, Israel, and other countries as well as hosts the editorial office of the European Psychologist, the official journal of the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA).

In addition to members of the department of developmental psychology CADS has several positions for international guest professors as well as for Ph.D. students and young investigators. The work is supported by technical assistants. Currently, about 30 members are engaged in research and application. The Friedrich Schiller University of Jena offers office and laboratory space. Our labs allow video observation and analysis of, for example, the interaction between parents and their children, the simulation of entrepreneurial decision-making, or research of product safety such as toys.

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For research and education purposes we offer access to extensive data sets from longitudinal and cross-sectional studies on a broad range of topics as well as from prevention programs with adolescents and their families. The data is professionally managed, documented on CD-Rom, and provides a menu-based (German and English) interface facilitating own statistical analyses. Work on these data sets is being facilitated by an extensive archive of previous analyses and publications.

Currently, the following research and applications projects are being supported financially by the following institutions:

German Research Foundation, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, German Cancer Aid, German-Israeli Project Coordination, German National Academic Foundation, Thuringian Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture, Philip Morris GmbH, and other sponsors.

The current projects investigate the following themes related to psychosocial development, always from a basic as well as an applied scientific perspective:

- Individual and social resources for coping with social change
- Acculturation and delinquency among immigrants in cross-national comparisons
- Pubertal timing and psychosocial adaptation
- Regulation of life plans and psychological well-being in elderly cancer patients
- Antecedents and consequences of ambivalence regarding marriage and parenthood
- Enhancement of life skills and substance use prevention in schools
- Leisure time activities and positive development
- Personality development and entrepreneurial success
- Training for the promotion of entrepreneurial potentials
- Agency in the transition from university to work

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