

## **IPSY - Evaluation of a Life-Skills-Program against Substance Misuse in Adolescence**

“Independent Studies”: Research-Oriented Program for Graduate Students

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The aim of a current project of the research group: ‘Promotion of Positive Development and Prevention of Problem Behaviours’ is to evaluate an already implemented school based life-skills-program against substance misuse in adolescence.

Prevalences of problem behaviours such as the consumption of legal substances (alcohol, nicotine) increase during adolescence. Results indicate that prevention of substance misuse is possible through Life-Skills-Programs that combine different prevention strategies by the training of general and substance-specific life-skills (e.g. resistance skills), and provide information using interactive teaching methods (e.g. role play). Life-skills should enable children and adolescents to deal with everyday challenges and tasks in an effective and competent way. Combined with substance-specific skills and knowledge, Life-Skills-Programs can delay the onset of substance use and reduce consumption patterns during adolescence. This type of strategy is typically implemented before adolescents start to experiment with legal substances, i.e. at the age 12 (in Germany).

One example from our own research in this area is the Life-Skills-Program IPSY (IPSY = Information + Psychosocial Competence = Protection) which aims at the delay of onset and the reduction of consumption of misuse and abuse of alcohol and tobacco. IPSY was designed for 5<sup>th</sup> graders (age 11) including two booster sessions in the following school years at grades 6 and 7 (age 12 and 13). The theoretical basis was the underlying model for life skills education (WHO) and models from developmental psychopathology which postulate risk and protective factors for adolescent substance misuse.

Ongoing evaluation studies in our research group mainly test differential intervention effects (e.g. differences in effectiveness between students with and without behavioural problems during childhood). A major role plays the identification of mediating mechanisms and moderating variables. Findings from those examinations help to understand the way how IPSY works and under what circumstances it’s effectiveness is high or low.

Results of already conducted analyses show that that the IPSY program has very positive effects on the short-term and the long-term development of participating students. According to this for students who took part in the program the characteristic onset of substance use could be delayed. IPSY students who had already made experiences with smoking or drinking reduced their amount or frequency of substance use. Furthermore the program showed positive effects concerning the promotion of resistance skills, self-esteem and school bonding. The IPSY program has also shown to be very effective in an international context. The results of the implementation and evaluation in Italy were similar to that in Germany.

Participation in our project and ongoing studies will give the opportunity to test further hypotheses related to the mechanism explaining the effectiveness of the Life-Skills-Program IPSY. Participants will get deeper insights into contemporary prevention and evaluation research, the development of psychopathology in adolescence (e. g. alcohol misuse) and methodological issues like strategies for analyses of longitudinal data (ANOVA with repeated measurement, Logistic Regression and Latent Growth Modelling). Collaboration in the IPSY project will offer students the opportunity to do their own supervised studies which can then be presented as a poster on a scientific conference.