

## Promoting Self-Esteem and Social Integration in Secondary German Schools: An Evaluation Study

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**Abstract :** Introduction: Over the last decades growing rates of mental health concerns among children and adolescents have been observed. At the same time, physical well-being of children and adolescents becomes increasingly impaired as well. Schools play an important role in preventing mental and physical disorders and in promoting well-being. Self-esteem, as well as social integration, are vital influence factors for mental and physical well-being. The purpose of this study was to develop and evaluate the program 'VorteilJena' for secondary schools in Germany focusing on self-esteem and social integration to improve mental and physical well-being. Method: The school-based health promotion program was designed for students in 5th grade and higher. It consists of several short pedagogical exercises instructed by a teacher and were integrated into the regular class over the course of ten weeks. The exercises focused on fostering social integration using either tasks improving team spirit or exercises that increase tolerance and sense of belonging. Other exercises focused on strengthening the self-esteem of the students. Additionally, the program included a poster exhibition titled 'Belonging' which was put up in the school buildings. The exhibition comprised ten posters which addressed relevant risk factors and resources related to social integration and self-esteem. The study was a randomized controlled sequential study with a pre and post measurement conducted in ten German schools. A total of 1642 students (44% male) were recruited. Their age ranged from 9 to 21 years ( $M=12.93$  years;  $SD= 2.11$ ). The program was conducted in classes ranging from 5th to 12th grade. Results: The program improved wellbeing, self-esteem and social integration of the involved students compared to the control group. Differential effects depending on implementation rates or age of the students will be analyzed. Moreover, implications for future school-based health promotion programs targeting self-esteem and social integration will be discussed. Conclusion: Social integration considerably influences self-esteem and well-being of students and can be targeted by school-based programs including short and modest exercises. Since a sufficient implementation of health promotion programs is essential, the present program due to its practicability represents a good opportunity to install health promotion focusing on social integration in schools.

**Keywords :** social integration, well-being, health promotion in schools, self-esteem

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