

What Works Clearinghouse



(Revised) July 2009

WWC Quick Review of the Article “Effects of Social Development Intervention in Childhood 15 Years Later”[†]

What is this study about?

The study examined the long-term effects of the *Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP)*, an elementary-school-based intervention designed to improve students’ social skills and engagement.

The study analyzed data on about 600 young adults who had been students in 15 public elementary schools serving high-crime areas in Seattle, Washington in the 1980s. Study participants were interviewed at ages 24 and 27.

Starting in 1981, classrooms in eight schools were randomly assigned to offer *SSDP* in grades 1 to 4. In 1985, seven similar schools were added to the study, with some nonrandomly selected to offer *SSDP* in grades 5 and 6.

This created three research groups: (1) students receiving *SSDP* in both early and later elementary school; (2) students receiving *SSDP* in later elementary school only; and (3) students not receiving *SSDP* services.

Features of the *Seattle Social Development Project*

Teachers receive five days of training in classroom management, interactive teaching, and cooperative learning skills.

Students are taught social skills centered on solving problems without resorting to aggressive behavior.

Parents are offered classes on how to manage their child’s behavior, provide academic support at home, and reduce their child’s risk of drug use.

WWC Rating

The research described in this article is consistent with WWC evidence standards with reservations

Strengths: The research groups were well-matched on a number of initial characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, and childhood poverty.

Cautions: The authors examined more than 40 outcomes for the three research groups. Estimating a large number of effects increases the possibility that some may be found to be statistically significant by chance. The authors do not adjust for this possibility when reporting the statistical significance of individual effects. In addition, the research groups were not created randomly. Although the authors report that the groups were similar on a number of initial characteristics, there may have been unobserved differences between the groups that may have affected the results.

What did the study authors report?

Receiving *SSDP* in both early and late elementary school improved some mental health outcomes in young adulthood and reduced the likelihood of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. The program did not affect rates of substance use or involvement with the criminal justice system.

The WWC has reservations about these results because the research groups may have been different from each other in ways not controlled for in the analysis.

[†]Hawkins, J. D., Kosterman, R., Catalano, R. F., Hill, K. G., & Abbott, R. D. (2008). Effects of social development intervention in childhood 15 years later. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 162(12), 1133–1141.