

PEER RELATIONSHIPS AND ADOLESCENTS MENTAL HEALTH: FINDING FROM THE SEYLE PROJECT IN ITALY

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Introduction: Peer relationships play a critical role in the development of adolescents, not only for the acquisition of social skills but also for the sense of personal identity and competence. Thus the quality of peer relationships influences actual and future mental health of the adolescent.

Objectives: SEYLE (Saving and Empowering Young Lives in Europe) is a randomized controlled trial, funded by the EU, evaluating interventions for mental health promotion and suicide prevention. The study comprised 12,395 high-school students from 11 European countries.

Aims: We investigated the differences on psychological problems between students with poor and good peer relationships.

Methods: 1,195 adolescents (mean age 15.3±0.6; 68% females) from the Molise region constituted the Italian sample. Adolescents were identified as with poor peer relationships if they never or just sometimes get along with people of their age, feel that peers like having them in the group and feel that peers were kind and helpful. Psychometric measures were used to assess mental health problems such as depression (Beck Depression Inventory II), anxiety (Zung Self-Assessment Anxiety Scale), well-being (WHO-5) and suicidal ideation (Paykel Suicide Scale).

Results: Adolescents who reported poor peer relationships scored significantly higher ($p < .005$) on the scales assessing depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation and significantly lower ($p < .001$) on the WHO-5.

Conclusions: Particularly in adolescence peer relationships may influence psychological well-being and vice versa mental health influences the openness to the others. So promoting mental health and contemporary improve social skills could lead adolescents to a better life.