

Anika Schwager Universität Leipzig\*

## Self-Defence at Primary Schools

*An overview about current programs*

### Abstract

Self-defence as a means of last resort becomes important when violence prevention has tried everything, but failed. Surveys and evaluation studies have already been conducted, and are well advanced, in respect of violence prevention programs for children and youths. Equal endeavours for self-defence trainings have yet to be attempted (cf. Kliegel & Zeintl, 2009; Schick, 2010, pp. 98, 125). This paper, therefore, aims at an overview of current programs in Germany with a focus on self-defence/assertiveness for primary school children. Additionally, the paper is aiming at disclosing possible means of evaluating said programs.

**Keywords:** self-defence, assertiveness, primary school children, conflict management

### Zusammenfassung

Selbstverteidigung fängt da an, wo Gewaltprävention nicht mehr greift. Bestandsaufnahme von und Evaluationsforschung zu Gewaltpräventionsprogrammen (PP) für Kinder und Jugendliche sind fortgeschritten, jedoch fehlen entsprechende Bemühungen, die sich auf Selbstverteidigungsangebote für Kinder konzentrieren (vgl. Kliegel, M. & Zeintl, M., 2009; Schick, 2010, S. 98, 125). Ziel dieser Arbeit war es daher, einen Überblick über die in Deutschland existierenden Programme zu geben sowie Möglichkeiten der Evaluation aufzuzeigen.

**Schlagwörter:** Selbstverteidigung, Selbstbehauptung, Grundschulkinder, Konfliktbewältigung

#### \*Contact

Anika Schwager  
Universität Leipzig  
Erziehungswissenschaftlichen Fakultät  
Grundschuldidaktik Sport

anika.schwager@uni-leipzig.de

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## Introduction

As a means of last resort, self-defence takes over when violence prevention has tried everything, but failed. Learning effective self-defence techniques at an early age should improve children's confidence, their social and motor skills. It should also provide an opportunity to experience their own limits as well as teach conflict management strategies, thus contributing to, and complementing, violence prevention (i. a. Dirnbacher & Bauer-Pauderer, 1991, pp. 12-19; Hartnack & Diekmann, 2011, pp. 159-166). In this respect, physical education (PE) as a space for experience and activity, offers special opportunities in teaching new competencies, and helping children cope on a long-term basis with physically and/or mentally trying situations that are still common at school as well as in society. Moreover, physical education is getting hold of more children than organised sport associations are able to, and can even be beneficial to the latter.



*Fig. 1. Defence against a grab from behind with arms pinned (from left to right): Lift arms up, drop down low, and run away fast (Photos: Rebecca Porteus).*

In terms of research, surveys and evaluation studies concerning violence prevention programs for children and youths have already been conducted, and are well advanced. In contrast, equal endeavours with the focus on self-defence trainings for children have yet to be attempted (cf. Kliegel & Zeintl, 2009; Schick, 2010, pp. 98, 125). Hence, the goal of this paper is an overview of existing programs in Germany with a focus on self-defence/assertiveness for primary school children, as these programs should support children's personal development: They not only endeavour to teach them important competencies for conflict management, but also values like fairness and respect. Additionally, the paper is aiming at disclosing possible means of evaluation in the process.

## Methods

The author undertook an overview of current programs. As a first step, I searched for the keywords Selbstverteidigung (self-defence) and Grundschule (primary school) in four databases: SURF (provided by the Federal Institute of Sport Science, Germany), PubPsych, ViFA: Sport and FIS Bildung. The first two databases came up with zero results, FIS Bildung revealed one, and ViFa: Sport six results. All of them were practice-oriented, though, and none a scientific paper with links to the research question. Based on this, the second step was to expand the search with the same keywords to the World Wide Web. The search was conducted over ten days via Google as the biggest and most popular search engine, and lead up to about 142.000 hits on average. As the relevant hits per page decreased notably after page 20, only these first 20 pages were analysed. Each day of the search, all of the previously analysed pages were checked again to make sure no link had been missed as the order of priority often changes daily. The procedure was kept up until every link on the designated 20 pages had been trailed. Thus, over 200 links have been followed in the process. In the end, 78 relevant hits could be listed. Firstly, these hits were analysed qualitatively by categorially interpreting, and coding them in Word. Secondly, they were transferred into Excel to process the data with the help of quantitative statistics. Here, they were reduced to 67 hits according to the research question, and finally depicted descriptively.

## Results

The final analysis included 67 hits with regard to self-defence training at primary schools in Germany. Most of the trainings were located in Bavaria, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein, but there were also two providers each who operated inter-state, or even nationwide respectively. No hits could be found for Saarland and Hamburg, though the latter was covered by one of the inter-state providers based in Schleswig-Holstein. 31 percent of all trainings were solely self-defence courses, 30 percent were trainings focussing on a combination of self-defence and assertiveness (SD + A), and in 39 percent of all cases self-defence training was incorporated in violence prevention programs (PP).

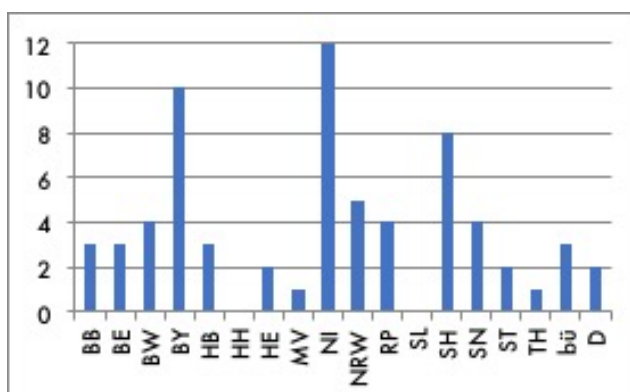


Fig. 2. Number of programs per state, inter-state (bü), and throughout Germany (D).

These programs combine prevention training with assertiveness and self-defence. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the 67 analysed hits over the states, figure 3 shows the type of training offered.

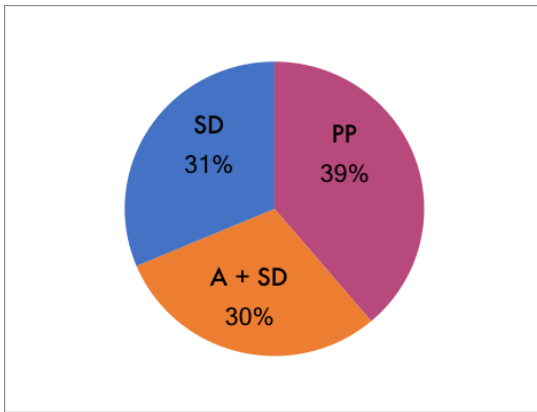


Fig. 3. Type of training offered

Figure 4 shows the implementation of trainings at school divided into the categories Physical Education (6 hits), school related afternoon activities (24 hits), trial sessions in cooperation with sports clubs (5 hits), days of project work (11 hits), and courses (26 hits). Only specific pupils were able to participate in 46 percent of all analysed trainings because the respective class would be offered as a school related afternoon activity, a selectable option, or was only booked for specific forms.

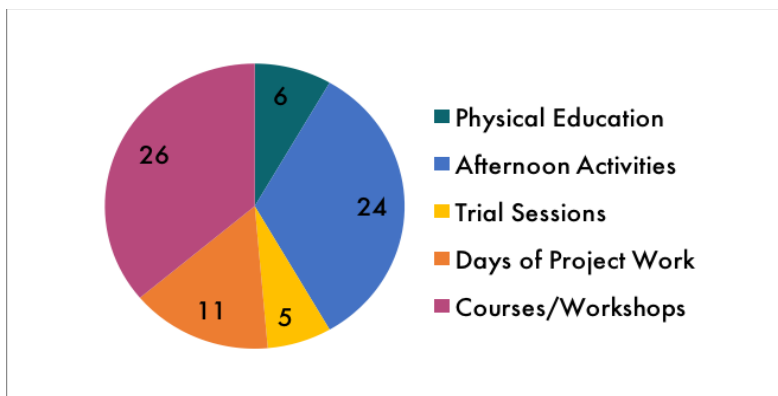


Fig. 4. Implementation of trainings at school (number, multiple assignments possible)

However, 31 percent of the analysed trainings were available to every child their concept catered for. For 17 percent participation was basically possible for all pupils, though attendance depended on external factors such as the kind of training booked by the school, or financial matters etc. (cf. Fig. 5).

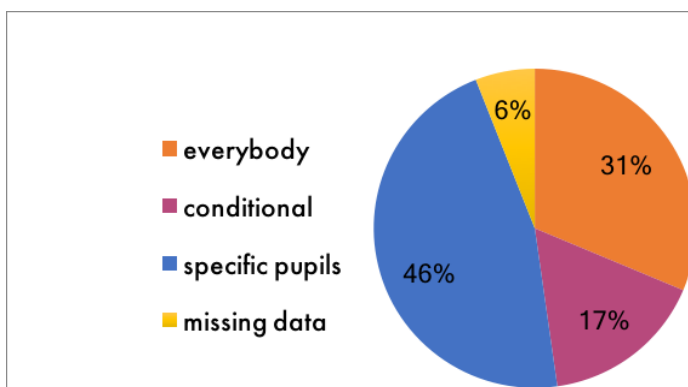


Fig. 5. Feasibility of participation

Six providers either cooperated with the local police, or the police itself was the providing authority. About 24 percent of the analysed cases have the potential for sustainability as they provide refresher trainings or advanced courses. Nevertheless, only 17.9 percent of the time this potential was turned to good account. The author was able to define twelve concepts in greater detail. Two of these were developed in cooperation with the Universities of Hamburg and Kiel, respectively. The first is the so-called KISI (Kindersicherheits-, that is children's safety)-Training, the second is a concept of Kampfkunstschulen (martial arts schools) Schleswig-Holstein (KSH). Both are violence prevention programs. Still, only the KISI-Training and the concept "Nicht mit mir!" (Count me out!) of the German Jujutsu-Federation have been evaluated so far (Huber & Sklizović, 2011; Lehnert, 2014).

## Discussion and Conclusion

Self-defence training in a primary school setting in Germany is combined primarily with assertiveness and prevention training, which is equivalent to a systemic approach. In our society, imparting skills to manage conflicts and critical situations in a violence free, intelligent manner, while being able to defend oneself at the same time, is becoming more and more important. Hence, for the purpose of sustainability, prevention programs should present a useful addition to school life by becoming a scheduled part of the curriculum as a whole, or physical education in particular. To improve the amount of evaluation studies concerning the existing programs, a comparison with the quality features and tools of assessment named in the brochure of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kinder- und Jugendschutz Nordrhein-Westfalen (Association for the Protection of Children and Youths North Rhine-Westphalia; cf. AJS NRW e. V., 2017) would be advisable as a first step towards quality evaluation. This includes looking at the framework, contents, and goals, of a course as well as the trainer's qualification. Moreover, an examination of the above-mentioned programs with questionnaires in addition to taking video footage in a pre-post-follow-up design, and in comparison to a control group, could help with measuring the quality of a program.

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