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DESCRIPTIONS OF INNOVATIVE APPROACHES INCLUDING PROFESSIONALS' AND YOUNG PEOPLES' PERCEPTIONS AND NARRATIVES

Authors:

Niels Graf and Heino Stöver

Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences



SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS IN THE REPORT

- In Germany, only a few initiatives focusing on drug use among young people in touch with the criminal justice system (CJS) do exist. “Kiff im Griff” (KiG) is one these initiatives offered by Balanx e. V. in Berlin-Neukölln.
- KiG is an example of acceptance-oriented drug work. It is a brief intervention aiming at drug-using delinquent juveniles that combines elements of Prochaska’s and Di Clemente’s model of “stages of change”, motivational interviewing (MI), group pedagogy and the training program “Kompetenz im selbstbestimmten Substanzkonsum” (Competence in self-determined substance use; KISS).
- While KiG has to meet several challenges (e. g. establishing intrinsic motivation in a context of force), it seems to be quite effective in changing young people’s perspectives on (their) drug use.

1. INTRODUCTION

This national report provides an overview of one innovative intervention aiming at secondary prevention of drug use among delinquent juveniles in Germany, namely “Kiff im Griff” (KiG; loosely translated as “Keeping Dope under Control”) provided by Balanx e. V. in Berlin. After a short description of the data sources used for this report, the paper firstly provides an in-depth description of the intervention and introduces the aims, structures and principles of KiG. Secondly, challenges and opportunities of KiG will be discussed. Lastly, the main contents of this report will be summarized in a short conclusion.

KiG has been chosen as one example of good practice (respectively as an innovative intervention) for various reasons. Firstly, as shown in the first national report, there are only little relevant initiatives focusing on drug use among young people in touch with the criminal justice system (CJS) in Germany and two of them do not exist anymore as these were pilot projects that did not receive further funding (Graf/Stöver 2017: 15). KiG, hence, represents one of the few relevant initiatives in Germany. Secondly, KiG could be described as “innovative” as its methods, aims and principles clearly differ from the main ideas behind classical drug counselling in Germany (see below). Lastly, the program KiG exists since 2006. Contrary to most other projects focusing on drug use among delinquent juveniles in Germany, it is, hence, possible to draw on a relatively long tradition of experiences made within KiG.

2. DATA

This report is based on internal documents provided by Balanx e. V. as well as qualitative, semi-structured interviews conducted with professionals of Balanx e. V. and juvenile participants of KiG. The internal documents used for this report are a report describing the main elements of KiG (Balanx e. V. 2006) and a report about the main results of an evaluation of the program conducted by staff of Balanx e. V. in cooperation with an external partner (Schmolke/Streuff 2010). Staff of Balanx e. V. interviewed for this report (n = 2) was involved in the design and implementation of KiG and, since then, provide KiG courses on a regular basis. Both of the interviewed professionals, hence, have an in-depth overview of the project and long-lasting experiences made within KiG. To assess the perspective of juvenile delinquents as well, two interviews were conducted with juvenile participants of KiG. The juvenile interview partners were chosen by staff of Balanx e. V. Both juveniles, however, were the only regular participants of KiG when the first interviews were conducted.

3. DESCRIPTION OF KiG

Main aims and place of delivery

KiG is a community intervention provided by Balanx e. V. in Berlin-Neukölln. KiG mainly aims at encouraging juvenile delinquents to critically examine their cannabis use and motivating them to change their drug use patterns. Concerning this change of drug use patterns, KiG does not necessarily aim at promoting abstinence, but rather tries to motivate juvenile delinquents to achieve self-imposed goals related to their cannabis use (Balanx e. V. 2006; Interviews with professionals). KiG, hence, is an example of acceptance-oriented drug work. While crimes already committed are not discussed within the project, KiG moreover aims at motivating delinquent juveniles to deliberate to what extent their drug use enables or facilitates future offences in order to avoid further criminal activity (Interview professional 1). The aims of KiG could hence be summarized as follows:

- Enabling a deliberation on the handling of cannabis and use motives
- Facilitating a deliberation on personal boundaries and (positive and negative) consequences of drug use
- Supporting independent decisions
- Promoting and sustaining the competence to tackle and cope with changes
- Supporting changes of use patterns
- Avoiding future offences

Description of the target group

The target group of KiG consists of juvenile delinquents who have received an instruction to participate in an advisory service related to cannabis by a youth judge according to § 10 II of the German Juvenile Justice Law due to a committed crime (on this and other educational measures within the German Juvenile Justice Law, see Graf/Stöver 2017: 8) and whose cannabis use is perceived to be problematic. KiG, hence, focuses on young people whose cannabis use is perceived to have negative consequences for their social (re-)integration (Balax e. V. 2006; Schmolke/Streuff 2010: 1). While the professionals interviewed perceive cannabis use to be common (and relatively problematic) among most young people in touch with the CJS, most juvenile participants of KiG de facto have committed a violation of the German Narcotics Law as courts only address drug use trajectories of young offenders in a systematic manner in these cases (Interviews with professionals). Moreover, for various reasons (general patterns of juvenile delinquency in Germany, culturally contingent patterns of drug use etc.) most participants of KiG are young boys or men aged between 14 and 24 years. Per year, only 4-5 young women participate in KiG who are in most cases supervised in separate courses.¹ Participants with a migratory background are overrepresented in KiG and the educational level of most participants is comparatively low (Interviews with professionals; Schmolke/Streuff 2010: 4).

In order to be able to participate in KiG, all young offenders have to fulfill some basic criteria: Firstly, they should be able to appear sober and punctual at all KiG dates and possess some basic group skills. Secondly, they should mainly use cannabis. A principal use of other drugs than cannabis is an exclusion criterion. Lastly, KiG aims at young people who are in need of a pedagogical intervention, but not of a drug treatment due to drug addiction in a strict, medical sense. In latter cases, staff of Balax e. V. tries to motivate young people to make use of inpatient treatment (Balax e. V. 2006; Interview professional 1).

History, funding and people involved

Balax e.V. implemented KiG in 2006. Its implementation has been suggested and supported by staff of the probation services for young offenders in Berlin and several youth judges due to their perception that intense drug use, esp. of cannabis, is not only widespread among young offenders, but typically also endangers the success of their care and increases the risk of future offences. Against the background, however, that secondary prevention services for drug using young offenders were (and still are) largely missing, they asked for the implementation of such services (Balax e. V. 2006: 1; Schmolke/Streuff 2010:

¹ Moreover, Balax e. V. offers courses for single persons. These courses are based on the same principles and methods as the group training KiG.

1). Since then, KiG is funded by donations of the Senate Administration for Education, Science and Research of Berlin. While the financial framework of KiG is perceived to be sufficient by the interviewed professionals, Balanx e. V. has to apply for new donations every year (Interviews with professionals). Within KiG, Balanx e. V. closely cooperates with staff of the probation services for young people, but offers the program independently. The training courses within KiG itself are conducted by social workers of Balanx e. V. who make use of continuous advanced education in several areas of social and drug work in order to ensure a high quality of the KiG training courses (see below).

Theoretical basis and methodological approach of the intervention

The theoretical background of KiG is provided by Prochaska's and Di Clemente's (1982) model of "stages of change". The training procedure is aligned to the stages of this model (precontemplation, contemplation, termination, action, and maintenance). Commonly, participants are situated in the stage of precontemplation at the beginning of the KiG training course and should be accompanied through the different "stages of change" by the systematic conduct of the training courses. Potential resistance of participants within the training is seen as an indicator that the trainers are working in a stage of change that is yet not applicable to the clients. For this reason, the training procedure is, as far as possible, handled in a flexible way. Furthermore, one-on-one conversations are conducted with participants if needed (Balanx e. V. 2006: 2-3; Schmolke/Streuff 2010: 2; Interviews with professionals).

Concerning the methodological approach, KiG trainers apply motivational interviewing which aims at establishing intrinsic motivation for behavior change (Miller/Rollnick 1999). MI, however, is modified according to crucial principles of group pedagogy in the context of KiG training courses as all courses mainly take place in a group setting (see below). Hence, group communication should be fostered as horizontal communication between peers has proven to be quite effective in drug work and the group of peers may serve as feedback providers and a corrective of motivational processes of single participants (Balanx e. V. 2006: 3; Schmolke/Streuff 2010: 2; Interviews with professionals). Moreover, KiG contains elements of the training program "KISS" (Kompetenz im selbstbestimmten Substanzkonsum – Competence in self-determined substance use). KISS is an open-ended behavioral self-control training to reduce (not necessarily stop) substance use and associated harms (Interview with professional 1).² Furthermore, it is noteworthy that all KiG trainers are former drug users. The occasional reference to their own history of

² For more information on KISS see Happel/Straub (2011).

drug use facilitates an open conversation about drug use within the group and increases their credibility among the participants (Interviews with professionals; Schmolke/Streuff 2010: 2).

More specifically, the training encompasses two one-one-one conversations with the participants at the beginning and at the end of each training course as well as 27 hours of group work that are split into eight sequential group evenings (Balanz e. V. 2006: 4-5; Schmolke/Streuff 2010: 2). Each participant is only allowed to miss one group date as has been emphasized by one staff member: "In this respect, we are quite rigorous; there are very few exceptions for a second miss. We have to stick to according court's provisions and this is also important in that we have to preserve our credibility among public prosecution and the courts. They have to know that is impossible to cheat one's way through our courses" (Interview professional 1). However, whereas at the beginning of KiG in 2006, participants initially had to attend 9 group meetings, one group date by now has been replaced by the two one-on-one conversations. In this manner, Balanz e. V. aims at strengthening the relationship between participants and trainers and reducing unauthorized absence periods (Schmolke/Streuff 2010: 2).

The preliminary one-on-one conversation with every new participant at the beginning of the training takes place together with the probation officer of the young offender in question. It aims at introducing to the principal elements of the training course and, most importantly, at establishing an at least preliminary intrinsic motivation to participate in the training. This is important because young offenders are typically forced to participate in the program by a youth judge and, accordingly, mostly do not have any intrinsic motivation (Interview professional 1). Another important element of this preliminary talk is the assurance of confidentiality with regard to all issues the client raises throughout the training. The question of confidentiality has been negotiated by Balanz e. V. as a requirement for the implementation of the training to ensure open conversations within the training and a proper basis of trust with its clients (Schmolke/Streuff 2010: 2; Interview professional 1). Lastly, the transfer of the clients to the youth probation service happens in the one-on-one conversation at the end of the KiG training. It aims at ensuring that the initiated desire for change is continuously supported by that service. In order to secure the principle of confidentiality, all participants of the training can determine issues that should (not) be raised during this talk with a probation officer (Balanz e. V. 2006: 5; Interview professional 1).

Concerning the part of group work, each KiG group consists of up to 10 participants who are trained by a team of two trainers. The first workshop aims at establishing a feeling of togetherness in the group and a productive group atmosphere and is intended to provide basic information about the legal situation and cannabis. During the subsequent group participants are then encouraged to (1) monitor and reflect their own drug use, to (2) think about the advantages and disadvantages of their drug use (in order to make

visible the difficulties that have to be tackled), to (3) develop concrete aims, not only related to their drug use, but also concerning their lives in general, and, lastly, to (4) analyze which (personal and social) difficulties may counteract these aims and which (personal and social) resources may be used to achieve them.

The role of quality standards

When Balanx e. V. developed and implemented KiG, it did not draw on any existing principles of good practice, guidelines or quality standards. Instead, staff of Balanx e. V. developed the components and procedures of the training on their own. Yet, while doing so, professionals of Balanx e. V. defined some requirements concerning the qualification of the trainers working within KiG in order to ensure an appropriate quality of the trainings. Accordingly, all KiG trainers have to be experienced social workers with additional training in MI, KISS and mediation. Beyond the commitment to these requirements, however, professionals emphasized that Balanx e. V. is a quite small youth welfare agency and that they consequently do not have the resources to systematically develop and/or implement wide-ranging quality standards.

4. DEFINING THE PROBLEM AND IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The problem understanding and its perceived causes

The official description of KiG as well as the professionals working at Balanx e.V. describe drug use (esp. of cannabis) not only as being widespread among KiG's clients (respectively delinquent juveniles in general), but also as quite problematic in that drug use commonly dominates the everyday lives of those young people and impedes their social (re-)integration (Balanx e. V. 2006; Schmolke/Streuff 2010: 1; Interviews with professionals). As has been emphasized by one of the interviewed professionals: "Many of our clients assess themselves as addicted" (Interview professional 1). According to the interviewed professionals, however, drug use among juveniles participating in KiG, has to be viewed in light of their specific living conditions. As already indicated above, most participants of KiG are from relatively poor families with a low level of education and oftentimes "do not know how things work and are quickly overstrained. Many experience a needless process of delinquency, simply because they are not able and have not learnt to cope with demands" (Interview professional 2). Moreover, "many participants live beyond usual structures and do not know how to organize their daily lives; they partly live in societal structures that don't demand

this and exert negative, partly criminal influence (Interview professional 1). Lastly, most participants suffer from psychological stress, oftentimes resulting from “broken homes” (Interviews with professionals). Against this background, the interviewed professionals assume that there are little events in clients’ lives which they associate with quality of life. From the perspective of the professionals, many of KiG’s participants hence experience frustrating situations and suppress those situations by using drugs.

The interviewed juveniles participating in KiG didn’t tell much about their problem understanding. Contrary to the professionals’ perspective, they, on the hand, stated that they use(d) to smoke huge amounts of cannabis (up to 20 joints daily) and that this drug use sometimes inhibits other activities. On the other hand, they didn’t perceived KiG to be absolutely essential (Interviews with juveniles). As one juvenile stated: “Well, the program is useful, but it has not been that necessary for me. Nevertheless, I haven’t been harmed by it” (Interview juvenile 1). Concerning the backgrounds of their drug use, especially of cannabis, they simply emphasized that nearly all their peers are using it and that it is a good opportunity to have fun and find rest and relaxation.

Solutions and methods for preventing (harmful) drug use

The interviewed professionals find it to be absolutely necessary to facilitate an open conversation about drug use in order to not deter juveniles and to enable an intrinsic motivation among juveniles commonly forced to participate in the program. For these reasons, as outlined in section 3, they favor a combination of Prochaska’s and Di Clemente’s model of “stages of change”, MI and KISS and perceive this combination to be quite helpful: “We made good experiences with this approach. Many [of the participants; note of the authors] are also relieved that we don’t control how much they use but that this [KiG; note of the authors] is a forum in which it’s possible to talk openly” (Interview professional 1). Professionals also stressed that their approach offers the opportunity to be responsive to the needs respectively the perspectives of the clients. One professional, for example, stated: “There’s no point in me putting the client there where I would like him to be. Rather I have to meet him where he currently is” (Interview professional 1). Against the background of the perceived structurelessness of participants’ everyday lives and their seemingly frustrating experiences outlined above, KiG professionals moreover seem to be convinced that the specific procedure of the program (section 3) is helpful in motivating juveniles to develop their own goals (related to their drug use in particular, but also to their lives in general) and to generate useful resources (e. g. self-confidence) to achieve these aims (Interviews with professionals).

Interestingly, the interviewed juveniles seem to share this perspective. In particular, they appreciate that KiG works without predefined goals and allows space for own thoughts and steps. One juvenile, for example, asserted: „It’s very personal here. Here, trainers don’t work with predetermined things, but with the person itself” (Interview juvenile 1). The interviewed participants also emphasized that they like being together in a group, because this gives them the feeling of not being alone with their problems and shows them examples for how to find solutions for these problems (Interviews with juveniles). Moreover, one of the juveniles said that being together in a group offers the possibility to benefit from “more perspectives, more opinions, and more experiences” (Interview juvenile 1).

Indeed, the program seems to succeed in changing young people’s perspectives. While, as indicated above, both of the interviewed juveniles do not perceive KiG as absolutely necessary for them, they nevertheless describe that it changed their thinking about drug use (Interviews juveniles). For example, one adolescent stated: “I learnt to be more honest with myself. For example, that I don’t only smoke dope because I want that or because I deserve it. It [KiG; note of the authors] gave strength to me, I can also say “No”, that’s the addiction, it’s not me” (Interview juvenile 1). Evaluation data derived from a survey among 25 participants who successfully completed the first KiG courses seems to support this finding. Those participants were asked about their drug use at two different points in time – before beginning and after having completed KiG. Compared to their drug use before the KiG training, participants reduced their cannabis use by on average 55%. Accordingly, the average number of days of drug use within the last 30 days decreased from 22,4 days (before the training) to 12,9 days (after the training) and the amount of cannabis used within one month dropped from on average 26 g to 11,5 g. Moreover, the majority of the participants after the completion of the training only continued to smoke cannabis in the evening.

Challenges of delivering the intervention

From the perspective of the interviewed professionals, one major challenge of delivering KiG is the long time period that may pass between the court decision and the actual uptake of the intervention. For various reasons (among others an overload of criminal justice institutions), this period oftentimes lasts up to one year and in some cases even longer. According to the interviewed professionals, however, a direct transition from the court to KiG would be more fruitful as, in this case, juveniles probably would be able to perceive a correlation between their punishment and their participation in KiG. Without a perception of this correlation, however, it is hard to establish an intrinsic motivation for participating in KiG in a context of force (Interviews with professionals). The at least partially long waiting periods may also be an

explanation for why many juveniles who are obliged to participate in KiG de facto do not show up when the trainings begin (Schmolke/Streuff 2010: 2).

As depicted above, the interviewed professionals perceive the structural living conditions of participating juveniles as major drivers of their drug use. At the same time, however, professionals are completely aware that they cannot tackle these structural problems directly with the help of their programs. Hence, they perceive their work with delinquent juveniles as an important building block, but at the same time emphasize that structural change is needed as well (Interviews with professionals).

Last but not least, professionals have the impression that they constantly have to lobby for the needs of delinquent juveniles and to justify the necessity of specialized initiatives for drug-using young people in touch with the CJS in order to maintain their programs.

Ethics of universal versus targeted prevention

From the perspective of the interviewed professionals, in the case of delinquent juveniles, targeted prevention, as offered by KiG, is justified by the special requirements of delinquent juveniles compared to young people in general. Nevertheless, professionals are convinced that, especially related to cannabis, more universal prevention is needed as well and that KiG could also be of interest to other young people.

5. CONCLUSION

KiG is one of the few specialized initiatives concerning drug use among young people in touch with the CJS in Germany. It is a brief intervention offered by Balanx e. V. in Berlin that combines elements of MI, Prochaska's and Di Clemente's "stages of change", group pedagogy and KISS. While KiG has to meet several challenges, its approach seems to be quite promising in changing young people's perspectives on (their) drug use. Further research and evaluation data, however, is needed to assess KiG's effectiveness.

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