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.

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.


WWC quick reviews are based on the evidence published in the report cited and rely on effect sizes and significance levels as reported by study authors. WWC does not confirm study authors’ findings or contact authors for additional information about the study. The WWC rating refers only to the results summarized above and not necessarily to all results presented in the study.