

Follow-up and brief intervention of conscripts in Lausanne (FOBIC)

1. Summary

The transition from adolescence to early adulthood is often associated with increasing substance use and thus calls for preventive actions. An ideal opportunity to study this among men is the yearly conscription of 19-year-olds. The present study seeks funding for the pilot phase of a larger projected study having two major aims: a) identifying a cohort who will be assessed at conscription and followed up beyond the age of military service and b) using this ideal setting to prevent hazardous substance use (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis) by means of brief interventions (BI).

The aim of this proposal is to pilot the screening of conscripts at baseline (age 19 years) and to conduct brief interventions in a military setting. In this phase the study will focus on alcohol use only. It is planned to screen 1200 conscripts and to assign them to three groups of positively screened (assessment plus BI, assessment, no intervention) and two groups of negatively screened (assessment, no intervention). The use of different control groups has the advantage of being able to sort out regression to the mean effects from those of minimal interventions (assessment of alcohol use and consequences without BI) compared to BI. Assessing negatively screened conscripts blinds the army to the possibility of identifying at-risk drinkers who move on to subsequent assessment/BI following screening, thus optimising confidentiality for all conscripts. The project expects to sample 120 individuals per intervention/control group and (assuming a 20% attrition rate) to follow-up 500 individuals into the period following military school. Conscripts not attending military school will similarly be tracked by matching their follow-up intervals to those who did attend.

The final project offers the unique opportunity of delivering effective intervention to a large majority of Swiss men at a particularly vulnerable age for developing substance use-related disorders. The present proposal sets the stage for testing whether such an approach is feasible in collaboration with the army. A side benefit is that it will be possible to test the feasibility of initiating a large cohort study within the general population and not be restricted to limited samples of British doctors, nurses or other selective groups in the general population, as found in many of the recent longitudinal cohort research areas. It will thus stimulate knowledge about the precursors of substance use disorders, as well as more understanding of the risk and protective factors developing over time in this crucial phase of transition from adolescence to young adulthood.