Development and Validation of the Lausanne Alcohol Expectancy Task

Summary

Current state of research: While there is ample evidence on risky drinking in adolescence and beyond, authors argue that factors shaping this behavior are rooted much earlier, i.e. in childhood. Unfortunately, empirical evidence on children's alcohol expectancies is very limited. One reason for this might be that an age-appropriate, objective, reliable, time and cost-efficient, and convenient instrument to assess alcohol expectancies very early in life is still lacking.

Objectives: By addressing 36 specific hypotheses in three different empirical studies, the proposed project aims to develop and validate the Lausanne Alcohol Expectancy Task (LAET). The first study aims to provide empirical evidence demonstrating that the emotions shown by the individuals in the pictures in the LAET correspond to the dimensions of the circumplex model of emotion (Russell, 1980) (Goal 1; 8 hypotheses). The second study aims to test the correspondence between alcohol expectancies assessed by means of the LAET and the Berkeley Puppet Interview (Goal 2; 14 hypotheses). The third study aims to investigate to what degree the LAET can also be used in an older population, i.e. among 10 to 16-year-olds. In this age group, we will test the correspondence between alcohol expectancies assessed by the LAET and the corresponding expectancy items included in a larger questionnaire assessing adolescent health (Goal 3; 14 hypotheses).

Methods of data collection: Three different data collection methods will be applied. To test Goal 1, a questionnaire was developed showing one of the 16 LAET pictures on top and 12 emotions below. By mid-March 2013, 178 participants had completed the French version and 89 participants the German version of the questionnaire. The fieldwork to reach Goal 2 is carried out as part of the SNSF project 100014_140294, in which the LAET and the Berkeley Puppet Interview (BPI: Measelle, Ablow, Cowan, & Cowan, 1998) will be conducted in 40 preschool and nursery classes in the cantons of Vaud and Geneva. For Goal 3, data will be collected within the pilot tests for the 2014 Swiss contribution to the international Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children project, in which 12 to 15 school classes from the 5th to the 9th grade in both language regions will be selected (expected sample size and age range: 200-300 10 to 16-year-olds).

Expected value: Development of the LAET not only has strong potential to provide unique evidence on alcohol expectancies among preschoolers and adolescents in an age-appropriate, objective, reliable, time and cost-efficient, and convenient way. It will also provide a useful tool to stimulate research activities in a field that has previously been neglected by alcohol researchers, i.e. alcohol-related cognitions in childhood as potentially important precursors of later alcohol initiation and subsequent (risky) drinking patters. In line with experts in Switzerland stressing that prevention should start early, the proposed study will provide important indications for primary prevention. The results to be obtained will help us understand more about the alcohol expectancies of preschoolers in Switzerland. This will help to decide whether or not it is necessary to focus alcohol prevention at such an early age.

Dissemination strategies: Two articles will be published in international peer-reviewed journals and the findings will also be presented to an international audience at a scientific conference.