I Am Me: Adolescent Perspectives of a School-Based Universal Intervention Program Designed to Promote Emotional Competence

Kimberley Lakes, Helena May Nguyen, Marissa Jones and Sabrina E. B. Schuck

The aim of this paper is to describe a school-based universal intervention (the Tilly’s Life Center “I Am Me” program) to promote emotional competence and social-emotional skills in adolescents. We present results of a mixed-methods program evaluation conducted in public schools in Southern California. In Study 1, sixteen students (grades 10-12) participated in focus groups after twelve weeks of intervention. In Study 2, fifty-four students (grades 9-10) participated in either the universal intervention program (I Am Me) or a no-intervention comparison group for thirty-six weeks. We conducted focus groups with 50 adolescents in the I Am Me program and used quantitative methods to measure self-esteem and perceived stress at four time points for both groups in Study 2. Descriptive data suggested improvements in self-esteem and perceived stress among individuals participating in the I Am Me group. Thematic analysis of focus group data indicated that participants perceived improvement in key areas of emotional development, including: emotional competence (understanding, expressing, and regulating emotions), self-regulation, self-esteem, and social skills. Moreover, participants perceived the intervention as relevant and as having a positive lifelong impact on their development. Further research is needed to empirically validate these outcomes using a randomized experimental design.

Keywords: emotional development, emotional literacy, emotional competence, school-based intervention, prevention & intervention programs, mental health in schools