

Evaluation of the *Sortir Ensemble et Se Respecter/Herzsprung – Freundschaft, Liebe und Sexualität ohne Gewalt* Programme: Key Findings

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Translated from French to English by Elaine Sheerin-Transit TXT

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November 2020

Introduction

The programme to prevent violence among young couples *Sortir ensemble et se respecter* (SE&SR)^a and its counterpart in German-speaking Switzerland *Herzsprung – Freundschaft, Liebe und Sexualität ohne Gewalt* (*Herzsprung*)^b are based on Safe Dates¹, a programme developed and implemented in the United States during the 1990s. An evaluation of the US programme found that it had a positive impact on the behaviour of the target group.² Targeted at adolescents and designed to prevent and stop dating violence and improve interpersonal skills, *Herzsprung* and SE&SR are made up of a series of sessions which are led by two specially trained facilitators and seek to encourage participants to interact on and discuss a range of dating-related issues.

SE&SR/*Herzsprung* is an active learning programme which uses real-life scenarios, role play and non-verbal communication exercises to facilitate dialogue and discussion. Ideally, the sessions should be held on a weekly basis. The SE&SR programme consists of nine 75-minute sessions (two school periods), while *Herzsprung* has fewer (five) but longer (135 minutes each, or three school periods) sessions.

Since 2017 RADIX^c has overseen the national dissemination of SE&SR/*Herzsprung* in Switzerland, and has worked closely with the cantons concerned to implement and institutionalize the programme and ensure that it reaches the intended audience. SE&SR is implemented in a variety of settings, including schools, community centres and

children's homes.³ In contrast, the format of *Herzsprung* has been adapted specifically for implementation exclusively in a school setting.^{d4} The evaluation of the SE&SR and *Herzsprung* pilot projects – in the canton of Vaud and the city of Zurich respectively – found that the implementation setting, mandatory attendance and programme formalisation were key factors.^{3, 4}

To determine the impact of the programme on the adolescent participants, as well as their satisfaction and the satisfaction of the facilitators, a national evaluation was conducted between October 2018 and March 2020 based on data collected from questionnaires administered to participants and facilitators.

In addition, a qualitative evaluation was carried out based on findings from five focus groups and three interviews involving participants and facilitators.

The evaluation of the SE&SR/*Herzsprung* programme, is part of the national project, which is funded by the Oak Foundation and Health Promotion Switzerland. It has three key lines of enquiry:

- coordination and implementation of the national project. RADIX is in charge of evaluating the implementation process;
- programme implementation at cantonal level. The cantons are also responsible for monitoring the implementation process (cantonal overview of implementations), as well as distributing and collecting the pre- and post-programme participant questionnaires;

^a De Puy J., Monnier S., Hamby S.L. *Sortir ensemble et se respecter. Prévention des violences et promotion des compétences positives dans les relations amoureuses entre les jeunes*. 2009, 1st edition, Geneva: IES Suisse; 2016, 2nd edition, Lausanne: Equal Opportunities Office (BEFH).

^b Geiser L., Mathis S., Schmid C., Weingartner M. *Herzsprung – Freundschaft, Liebe und Sexualität ohne Gewalt*. 2017, eds: Equal Opportunities Office of the City of Zurich, Zurich Cantonal Department of Education, Zurich University of Teacher Education, and RADIX – Swiss Public Health Foundation.

^c RADIX, the Swiss Public Health Foundation, is a charitable organisation established under public law. It serves as a national centre of expertise on the

development and implementation of public health measures. Its projects are supported by the federal and cantonal authorities, private organisations and companies. [Source: <https://www.radix.ch/Qui-sommes-nous-IJ/PAhBE/>; viewed 25.08.2020]

^d The Charlotte Olivier Foundation (FCHO) hosts SE&SR and is responsible for the licensing rights in connection with the programme. The FCHO studied the feasibility of the SE&SR programme from 2012 to 2013. SE&SR was implemented as part of a pilot project in the canton of Vaud between 2013 and 2015. A version of SE&SR for German-speaking Switzerland was developed following an initiative by the City of Zurich, in partnership with the canton of Zurich. *Herzsprung* was tested in classroom setting during 2015.

- impact of the programme on adolescents; Unisanté carried out this part of the evaluation^e and issued a subsequent report⁵; this paper presents its key findings.

To determine the impact of the programme, the evaluation team focussed on the following three questions:

- How satisfied are the adolescents with the programme?
- What short-term effects has the programme had on adolescents?
- Which conditions, implementation settings and implementation models increase the effectiveness of the programme?



Figure 1 Participant satisfaction regarding the programme

Session and target audience characteristics

The evaluation covers 56 sessions provided by SE&SR (n=20) and Herzsprung (n=36) and attended by a total of 893 adolescents. The programme was implemented in the cantons of Zurich (53% of participants), Jura (20% of participants), Fribourg, Schaffhausen, Obwalden, Lucerne, Geneva and Bern.

In addition, an introductory workshop (in the cantons of Valais, Thurgau and Lucerne) attended by a total of 380 adolescents was subject to a simplified evaluation (see the Implementation models section below).

A little under three-quarters of the adolescent respondents attended the programme over a period of seven weeks or less. Herzsprung sessions each ran for 135 minutes; SE&SR

sessions were considerably shorter (between 45 and 90 minutes). Almost all participants attended the sessions in a school setting (98%). For 96%, attendance was mandatory.

The overwhelming majority of the Herzsprung curricula (90%) consisted of five sessions. The design of the SE&SR curricula was more heterogenous but most (47%) opted for four sessions, each lasting two school periods, rather than the recommended structure of nine 75-minute sessions.

Taking the number of participants who attended at least one of the sessions as the denominator, the average session attendance rate is between 78% and 88%; the number of sessions does not appear to have a significant influence on attendance rates.

The vast majority of respondents are aged 14 and 15 (76%), with proportionally more boys than girls (54% vs 45%). Seven respondents self-identify as intersex and one as transgender.

^e On 1 January 2019, the Policlinique médicale universitaire (the outpatient clinic of Lausanne University Hospital), the Lausanne University Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, the Institute of Occupational Health of the University of Lausanne, Promotion Santé Vaud and the Fondation vaudoise pour le dépistage du cancer (cantonal cancer screening foundation) merged to create Unisanté, the

Almost all respondents are still in compulsory schooling (98%) and a little over one-third has never dated (37%).

Moreover, the victimisation data show that exposure to partner violence among the adolescents who attended the SE&SR/Herzprung sessions was comparable to the exposure level among a representative same-age school population sample.^{6, 7} This indicates that the programme reaches its target audience and that there is no participation bias in favour of classes with a lower prevalence of victimisation problems (for more details, cf. Section 3.1.3 of the complete evaluation report⁵).

Programme satisfaction among adolescents

The results derived from the questionnaires indicate a high degree of satisfaction, especially among female respondents, with several aspects of the programme (Figure 1). Satisfaction levels were slightly lower for the practical components of the programme (usefulness of the topics discussed, real-world relevance) than for the quality of the interventions.

The qualitative findings from the focus groups and interviews indicate a high level of satisfaction among participants; overall, the programme is rated instructive, interesting, useful and reflective of real needs, *"I really liked the fact that it deals with dating because this an issue that we will all have to deal with one day. It's good to have pointers on what you should do and how you should react in certain situations"* (SE&SR). Among the adolescent respondents, the highest levels of satisfaction were recorded for the programme's interactive content and physical activities involving role play and the use of video material. They also appreciated that these activities prompted them to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours and offered practical advice on dealing with problematic situations. The adolescents also found that the facilitators were motivated and engaged, and appreciated the climate of trust that they built within the group. However, they singled out the repetitive content of some sessions (e.g. issues regarding school bullying and emotions) as a drawback, and found it hard to remain interested and engaged with certain components of the intervention because they were too static and long. Both adolescents and facilitators regret that the programme overly focuses on the negative aspects of partner relationships (violence, disrespect, conflict) and relies on a normative vision of dating (does not sufficiently factor in realities faced by homosexuals and other cultural contexts which differ from the dominant cultural context in Switzerland).

Programme satisfaction among facilitators

Facilitators' perception of participant satisfaction largely dovetails with the adolescents' self-reports. At the same time, the facilitators stress that the conditions in which the programme is implemented are key to its success. They single out several factors: the backing of directors of the institutions/heads of school where the programme is implemented, a more flexible and adaptable session design that spurs participants to make a proactive contribution, keeps them engaged and better addresses their needs while still pursuing the overall objectives of the programme.

Short-term effects among adolescents

Changes in gender stereotypes and attitudes to violence

The results from the questionnaires indicate that the programme has had a positive effect on the rejection of masculinity norms which legitimise the use of violence ('Rejection of masculinity norms' in Figure 2) and on the rejection of justifications for partner violence against men ('Condemnation of violence against men'). The rejection of the justifications for partner violence against women fell slightly. However, it is important to note that the pre-programme baseline was already very high (possible ceiling effect^f).

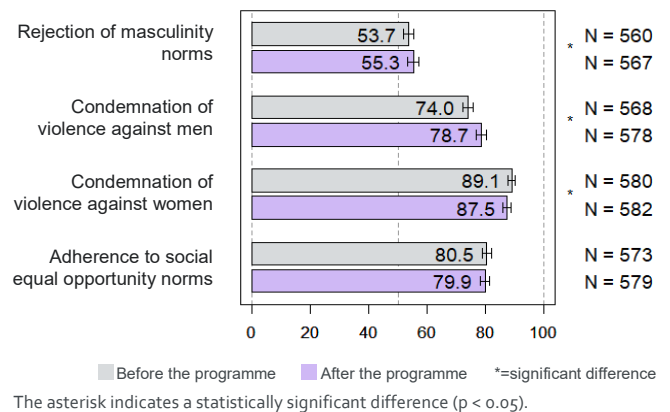


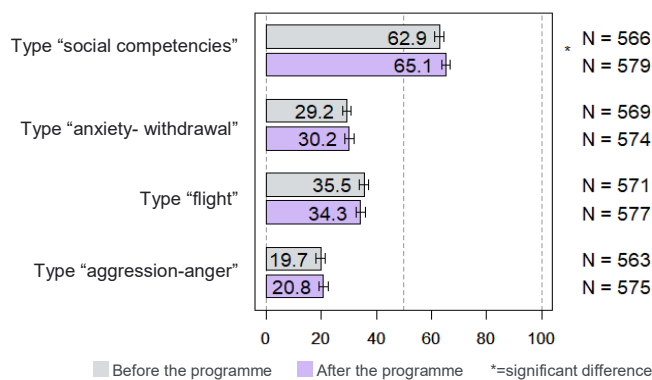
Figure 2 Pre- and post-programme scores on the rejection of masculinity norms which legitimise the use of violence, the rejection of justifications for partner violence, and adherence to social equal opportunity norms

^f A situation in which the majority of the values obtained for a variable are close to the upper limit of the scale used, making it difficult to measure an effect that is supposed to increase these values

The results from the focus groups indicate that both facilitators and adolescents found that the sessions prompted participants to think about and review their attitudes to gender and violence. It appears that the programme helps adolescents step out of their usual frames of reference, examine their own attitudes and behaviours and put the insights and skills they have acquired during the sessions, such as recognising the signs of an abusive relationship, into practice. As one facilitator reports about an activity in a Herzsprung session, "I felt that they had an 'aha-moment' and said to themselves, 'So that's what I really think and feel in a situation like this'. Or, 'This is the first time I have given it any thought and I realise that not everyone sees it the same way as I do.'" These are complex and subtle changes that questionnaires do not fully grasp and can only be consolidated through real-life experiences.

Changes in conflict resolution strategies

The quantitative results indicate that the deployment of conflict resolution strategies that require the mobilisation of social competencies was more prevalent after intervention than before (Figure 3). No effect is observed for other strategies, particularly those involving aggression and anger. However, it is important to note that even prior to the intervention, the deployment of these kind of strategies was rare (possible floor effect⁹).



The asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference (p < 0.05).

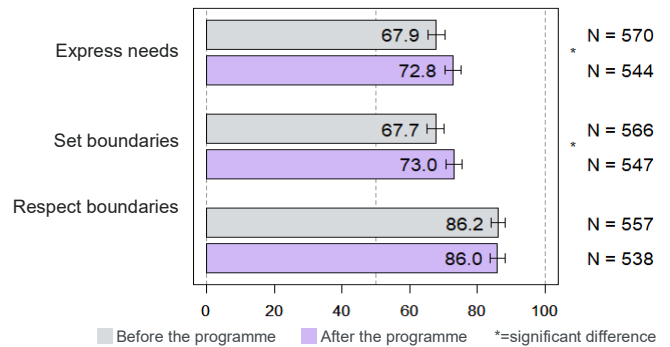
Figure 3 Strategies to resolve conflict with peers

In the facilitator focus groups, several attendees were of the opinion that sessions dealing specifically with emotions and reactions (final session both for SE&SR and Herzsprung) should be held earlier given that these are subjects which underscore many other components of the programme. For their part, the adolescents also expressed a certain level of boredom with the topics dealt with in the latter sessions and would have preferred to receive more practical advice which they could use in their everyday lives. Incorporating these observations into future implementations could bolster the effects that the conflict resolution strategy component of the programme seeks to achieve.

⁹ A situation in which the majority of the values obtained for a variable are close to the lower limit of the scale used, making it difficult to measure an effect that is supposed to decrease these values

Greater awareness of abusive behaviour and support services

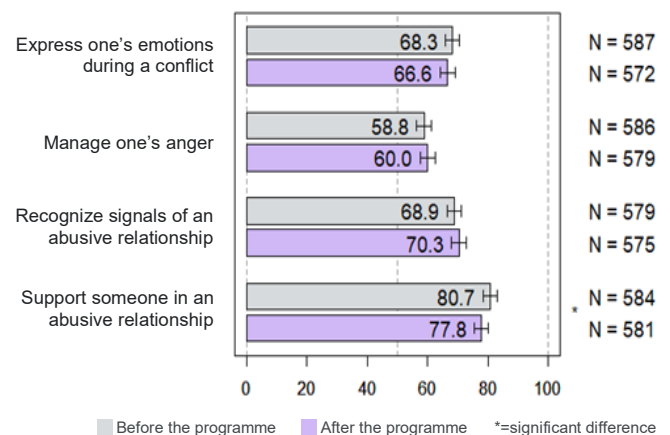
After the intervention, participants reported that they were better able to express their needs and set boundaries in an partner relationship (Figure 4). In terms of expressing one's needs, a stronger effect was observed among SE&SR programme participants than among their Herzsprung peers. The duration of the sessions is a major determinant of the effect on the participants' perceived ability to set boundaries, with the strongest effect observed for the 75-minute session format.



The asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference (p < 0.05).

Figure 4 Perceived ability to express one's needs and set and respect boundaries in a partner relationship

No changes were observed in how the adolescents perceived their ability to manage their anger, express their emotions and recognise the signs of an abusive relationship (Figure 5). However, a slight reduction was observed in the adolescents' perceived ability to support someone in an abusive relationship (high score both pre- and post-intervention).



The asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference (p < 0.05).

Figure 5 Managing anger, expressing emotions, recognising the signs of an abusive relationship and the ability to support

In contrast, the share of participants who reported that they would know where to seek help if they were to find themselves in an abusive relationship (Figure 6) is significantly higher after the intervention (89% vs 95%).

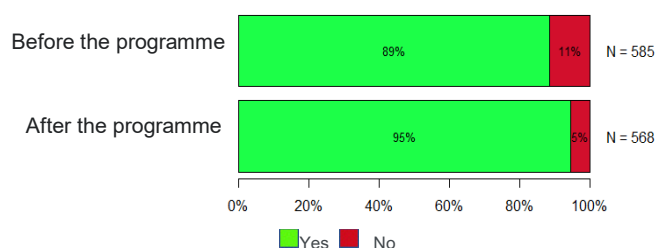


Figure 6 Knowing where to seek help

The results of the focus groups indicate that the knowledge and skills which the adolescents either remember from the programme or report that they have acquired due to their attendance are as follows: the phenomena of abuse and violence; ability to recognise the signs of a 'problematic' relationship; awareness of the support services that are available to them; and the ability to listen to and communicate with a partner.

Implementation models

Multivariate regression models were used to identify the most effective implementation models. They showed that SE&SR had a greater effect than Herzsprung on the rejection of masculine norms that legitimise the use of violence and the perceived ability to express one's needs. SE&SR also tended to have a more positive effect (marginally under the level of statistical significance) on the rejection of justifications for partner violence against women. The 75-minute session format is also associated with an increase in the share of adolescents who felt that they had the ability to set boundaries.

In terms of participant characteristics, the multivariate regression models found that the effect regarding the justification of partner violence against both men and women was higher among the female participants.

The focus group findings underscore the importance of content which actively engages the adolescents and are designed in such a way that it can be flexibly adapted to their needs. Another key determinant of the programme's effectiveness is the ability of facilitators to promote greater self-awareness and self-reflection among participants, and keep them interested and engaged for the duration of the intervention. These observations largely dovetail with the adolescents' self-reporting, in which they singled out a risk of disengagement and inattention due to repetitive content, too many sessions and overly formal and rigid content delivery, "*The facilitator repeated herself a great deal, so it ended up being a bit repetitive*" (SE&SR). Strong backing from the directors of the institutions/heads of school where the programme is implemented would bolster the effectiveness of the intervention.

The introductory workshops which were held during the evaluation period were the subject of a simplified assessment of participant and facilitator satisfaction. These workshops are the preferred course of action in situations where it is not possible to implement the complete programme. The aim of these workshops, which run for three to four school periods, is to make adolescents more aware of the subjects and issues addressed by SE&SR/ Herzsprung. To date, 22 workshops have been held and were attended by a total of 380 adolescents. The questionnaires show high levels of satisfaction among participants and facilitators.

Response to the evaluation questions

How satisfied are the adolescents with the programme?

The evaluation finds that adolescents positively rate the SE&SR/Herzsprung programme overall, and identifies areas which could be adapted to take better account of participants' needs (great focus on interactive and practice-based content, role playing and the positive aspects of partner relationships, as well as mainstreaming of cultural diversity, sexual orientation and gender identity, shorter sessions and less repetition).

What short-term effects has the programme had on adolescents?

Changes in gender stereotypes and attitudes to violence

The SE&SR/Herzsprung programme makes many young participants more aware of the importance of greater discernment in relation to gender stereotypes and the justification of partner violence. Although the quantitative data confirm that the programme has had a positive effect in many areas, these developments do not systematically translate into quantifiable changes in attitudes by the end of the intervention.

Changes in conflict resolution strategies

SE&SR/Herzsprung leads to the greater use of conflict resolution strategies that require the mobilisation of social skills. In doing so, the programme achieves one of its central aims. No effect was observed with regard to the use of other conflict resolution strategies, particularly those involving aggression and violence. However, the prevalence of such strategies was already very low prior to the intervention.

Improved ability to identify signs of abusive behaviour and greater awareness of support services

The evaluation indicates that the programme achieved its aim of making adolescents more aware of where they can go for help. Quantitative and qualitative results on the

ability of participants to identify the signs of an abusive relationship are partially contradictory. However, one explanation for this apparent contradiction is that one of the response options to this question referred to how often the adolescents thought they would be capable of recognising an abusive relationship. In addition, the post-programme questionnaire was administered immediately after the programme concluded, which means that not enough time had passed for the young respondents to be exposed to this type of situation. The focus group addressed this issue from a more theoretical standpoint and with no timeframe reference.

Reduction in abusive behaviour

Given the short interval between the administration of the pre- and post-programme questionnaires, the evaluation team decided, in consultation with RADIX, not to measure the effect of the intervention on the frequency of abusive behaviour. Longer reference periods (12 months for the partner victimisation scales) are needed to reliably measure abusive behaviours. While this behaviour is serious, it is however relatively uncommon.

Which conditions, implementation settings and implementation models increase the effectiveness of the programme?

With the exception of a stronger effect observed among female participants and SE&SR participants generally (limited results in both cases), the evaluation finds that the implementation model does not appear to be a significant determinant of the effectiveness of the programme. These quantitative results partly corroborate the findings of the focus groups, which stressed that the success of the intervention heavily depends on the ability to deliver session content that is interactive, leads to greater self-awareness and self-reflection among the adolescent participants, and keeps them interested and engaged. Despite (or due to) the less standardised implementation of SE&SR compared to Herzsprung, the fact that SE&SR is more flexible and able to adapt to participants' needs and feedback may partially explain the stronger positive effect observed for the intervention format adopted in French-speaking Switzerland. The greater adaptability of SE&SR may also explain the slightly higher satisfaction levels recorded among facilitators and adolescents. Both parties also agree that the sessions should be kept relatively short (a maximum of two periods of 45 minutes, with a break in between), that efforts should be made to avoid repetitive content and that fundamental issues and subjects should be addressed much earlier in the intervention. The facilitators also single out the importance of strong backing from the directors of the institutions/heads of school where the programme is implemented. Another measure they stated would boost the effectiveness of the programme is a canton-wide implementation.

Discussion and conclusion

Implementation of the SE&SR varies widely, although most implementations consisted of four (longer) sessions instead of the recommended nine sessions. In contrast, the implementation of Herzsprung is more uniform and in line with the recommendations as regards the number of sessions and the subjects to be covered. These observations and the results of the focus groups (difficulties gaining the support of school administrators, overlaps and problems sustaining participants' interest and attention over the course of the intervention) raises the question of whether it is realistic, or even desirable, to impose the nine-session standard of SE&SR in French-speaking Switzerland. This is further corroborated by the observation that the SE&SR implementation variations do not appear to have any impact on the effectiveness of the programme and the participants' and facilitators' satisfaction levels. Another question which the evaluation findings raise is whether the current implementation model adopted by Herzsprung could be adapted so that it covers the entire programme content in shorter blocks (e.g. five sessions over two school periods instead of the current five sessions over three school periods).

The evaluation has certain methodological limitations owing to technical and logistical constraints as well as the decision to anonymize the participants' responses. One of the limitations is the short period of time between the pre- and post-questionnaires and the small number of focus groups. It is difficult to quantify every effect that the intervention has had because the post-programme questionnaire is administered directly at the end of the intervention, therefore leaving insufficient time for the young participants to put the knowledge and skills they have acquired into practice. This is compounded by the inherent lack of precision of instruments developed to measure complex phenomena.

Despite these methodological challenges, the evaluation of the SE&SR/Herzsprung programme found that the intervention had achieved several of its core objectives. The findings also indicate that the programme content matched the needs and expectations of the target audience, and both facilitators and participants reported a high level of satisfaction with the programme. At the same time, the evaluation identifies areas that could be improved. They include a more flexible intervention design that makes it possible to adapt both the sequencing of the sessions and their content to better be able to adjust to participants' needs and reactions. The intervention should place a stronger emphasis on the positive aspects of partner relationships, improve the mainstreaming of cultural diversities, sexual orientation and gender identity and provide more interactive, less repetitive learning content.

Methodology note

The evaluation of the SE&SR/Herzsprung programme is external and summative in nature, relies on quantitative and qualitative data, and covers all SE&SR/Herzsprung sessions held between October 2018 and late March 2020.

Session logs completed by the facilitators at the end of each session made it possible to identify the implementation model and determine group attendance rates.

The participants completed questionnaires at the start of the first session (pre-programme questionnaire) and at the end of the last session (post-programme questionnaire). Both questionnaires generated data on gender norms, the justification of violence, conflict resolution strategies and participants' perceived skills and abilities (e.g. expressing one's needs and setting boundaries)^h; these data were used to conduct a participant profile analysis. The post-programme questionnaire also included a satisfaction survey.

The scores obtained for each satisfaction scale were standardised on a scale from 0 to 100. Rejection of the null hypothesis (i.e. no difference between pre- and post-programme survey results) was confirmed by a t-test for paired-data. For multiple-item scales, the score corresponds to the mean of the individual item scores.

All results are derived from an analysis of all participants who answered the questions related to a given result. The number of participants therefore may vary due to potentially missing data if questions were not answered.

Multivariate linear regressions were performed to identify individual and programme-related characteristics that are possible determinants of the effectiveness of the programme. Two models were applied. The first, which was adjusted for age and sex, examined the two versions of the programme (SE&SR and Herzsprung), while the second used a set of independent variables to ascertain the impact that the implementation model has on the effectiveness of the intervention.

The purpose of the participant focus groups and interviews (two focus groups in German-speaking Switzerland and one in French-speaking Switzerland, followed by three interviews) and the facilitator focus groups (one in French-speaking Switzerland and one in German-speaking Switzerland) was to collect first-hand accounts of the adolescents' and facilitators' experiences and opinions about the programme.ⁱ Questions were formulated jointly in French- and German-speaking Switzerland and a question grid

was developed. All discussions were recorded and transcribed in full. Each data set was coded and subject to a grounded theory-based analysis.¹⁰ An inductive approach was applied using MaxQDA software. The results of these first steps of analysis were compared and merged to generate an overall synthesis.

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Suggested citation

Bize R, Stadelmann S, Debons J, Amiguet M, Vujovic K, Lucia S. Evaluation of the Sortir Ensemble et Se Respecter/Herzsprung – Freundschaft, Liebe und Sexualität ohne Gewalt Programme: Key Findings. Lausanne, Unisanté – Centre universitaire de médecine générale et santé publique, 2020 (Raisons de Santé : Les Essentiels 18c) <http://dx.doi.org/10.16908/rds-essentiels/18c>

^h The scales used in the pre- and post-programme questionnaires completed by the adolescent participants were validated in previous studies on victimisation in Swiss school settings.⁶⁻⁹ For more details, see the full report.⁵

ⁱ Sibylle Mathis and Anja Sieber Egger from the Zurich University of Teacher Education conducted the focus groups and interviews in German-speaking Switzerland.