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The Ethiopian National Project

# The Ethiopian National Project: Program for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse 2008 Evaluation Study

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The study was initiated and funded by the Ethiopian National Project

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# **Executive Summary**

## **Introduction**

The Program for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse is one of the diverse interventions for adolescents offered by the Ethiopian National Project (ENP). It is implemented by the Efshar Non-Profit Organization in cooperation with the ENP, the Israel Anti-Drug Authority, the Ministry of Absorption and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services.

The program is culture-sensitive and aimed at Ethiopian-Israeli adolescents in grades 7-12 and their parents. It grew out of the realization that some of these adolescents display negative patterns of behavior related to alcohol abuse and – to a lesser extent – to drug abuse. In order to avert this type of behavior, the program strives to reinforce the self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy of the adolescents and their parents as well as the child-parent relationship. It also imparts information on the effects and dangers of alcohol and drug abuse. The basic assumption is that the greater one's inner strength, the greater the ability to withstand pressure, including the temptation to use drugs and alcohol. To this end, the program is based on small groups (10-14 participants) of Ethiopian-Israeli adolescents aged 12-19, meeting for some 25 sessions. The program's two moderators convey diverse content to the adolescents on alcohol and drug abuse, empowerment, self-efficacy and improved relations with parents. Concomitantly, the moderators hold a number of meetings with parents and more or less three joint adolescents-parent meetings.

The program was launched in 2005 with five groups in five different localities. By 2008, it had expanded significantly: there were 26 different groups in 20 localities all over Israel. This period saw the consolidation of work patterns and of the conceptions guiding the moderators.

The study goal was to supply feedback for purposes of program reinforcement and as a basis for further development. The study dealt with a number of topics:

1. Characteristics of participating adolescents
2. Program content
3. Extent of satisfaction and the participants' perceived program contribution
4. Implementation difficulties and suggestions for improvement

## **Research Methods**

In order to address the research questions, quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The quantitative data included questionnaires completed by the participating adolescents. A total of 211 questionnaires were completed by the adolescents (85% response). Qualitative information was collected in interviews with five different groups: program moderators, participating adolescents and mothers. In addition, the meetings of the steering committee were observed and the summaries of group meetings, written by moderators, were studied.

## Characteristics of Participating Adolescents

Some 10-14 adolescents participated in each group of the Program for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse. On average, about nine attended each session. In total, some 250 participated in the program in 2008 at 20 different localities. The average age of the target population – 12-19-year-olds (grades 7-12) – was 15.5. Most of the participants (71%) were native born and more or less equally distributed between girls and boys. For 16%, most of whom were girls, it was their second year in the program. The majority of the participants (89%) attended school, 10% completed their 12<sup>th</sup> grade studies that year and 1% had dropped out of school.

The socio-economic status of Ethiopian-Israeli adolescents, especially of program participants, was particularly low in comparison with Israel's general Jewish population. About half of the program participants (47%) reported that their families had no breadwinner and most of the families (89%) have at least four children.

In addition, the study examined a number of at-risk behaviors among program participants. One of these was alcohol consumption. A reported 39% had been drunk at least once. Alcohol consumption appears to be widespread among the adolescents, which makes the program's preventive activities all the more important. Furthermore, 17% of the participants noted that they had been drunk in the previous month, which was in fact the last month of their participation in the program.

## Program Content

The program comprises three main areas corresponding to its goals, each serving as the axis of different activities:

- ♦ ***Providing information on drugs and alcohol*** – Most of the adolescents (69%) felt that, to a large extent, the program had provided them with new information on alcohol and drugs and had led to change in patterns of behavior related to alcohol abuse. Only a few (5%) felt that the information was unnecessary. These findings attest to the program's importance in meeting the adolescent needs for information on the subject.
- ♦ ***Empowerment and enhanced self-efficacy*** – This is the most critical area of the program's implementation. It is guided by the view that alcohol and drug abuse are symptomatic of low self-esteem and negativity. According to the adolescents, the program evidently engendered significant change in their self-perceptions. For example, 62% of them said that, to a great extent, the program had helped them to understand new things about themselves; 58% said that the program had reinforced their ability to withstand peer pressure and 52% said that the program had helped them understand what they would like to do in the future.
- ♦ ***Reinforcing the adolescent-parent relationship*** – The program invests numerous resources in working with parents and in joint adolescent-parent meetings in order to strengthen the relationship between them. A significant proportion of the adolescents (42%) noted that, to a great extent, the program improved their relationship with their parents and about a fifth

(22%) said that they had not needed intervention to strengthen the relationship with their parents.

## **Program Characteristics**

- ♦ The adolescents' responses indicated that they highly respected the program moderators for caring about them (93% rated this as "to a great extent"), for listening to them and for helping them solve day-to-day problems.
- ♦ The program clearly has many strengths and seemed to meet the needs of the adolescents and their mothers, such as socializing with peers, sharing experiences and talking about difficulties. In addition, it evidently aroused the adolescents' interest; they felt that they were learning various new things relevant to their world and their lives, and they enjoyed the activities. The adolescents were also asked whether they had benefited from the program in a variety of areas; only a few reported that they did not require help in these areas. This, too, shows that the program was responsive to the adolescents' needs.
- ♦ At the same time, program implementers and participants made a number of suggestions about reinforcing parental enlistment and involvement; about instituting built-in arrangements for participant tardiness, absences and discipline problems; changing program hours so as not to interfere with summer vacation and adding more sessions as there was a sense that the process had been incomplete. For 16% of the adolescents, this was their second year in the program. They and their moderators were positive about the program's extension for an additional year and treating the material in greater depth.
- ♦ In addition, there was reference to the potential advantages of offering the program at local ENP adolescent centers, which would lend the activities a structured framework. The suggestion also arose out of sense of overlap between the various community programs targeting Ethiopian-Israeli adolescents and their parents: a need was noted to either avoid overlap or to use it wisely amid improved cooperation and coordination between the different programs.

## **Topics for Discussion**

The study findings, as they emerged from questionnaires and interviews, gave rise to a number of basic questions about the program that could benefit from discussion:

- ♦ ***Given the budgetary constraints, should the same adolescents continue for an additional year with more in-depth programming or should the program be offered to other adolescents in the community?*** Given the sense that the program had been incomplete, there is room for continuing it for a further year. Moreover, the second year was apparently successful, as learned from the interviews. On the other hand, the program is clearly beneficial even in its current format and it is perhaps preferable to expose more adolescents to it, increasing the numbers to whom it can contribute.
- ♦ ***Should deliberate action be taken to enlist fathers in the program?*** In most cases, it is the mothers who participate in the program. Only in isolated cases did the fathers attend. The

question is whether deliberate action should be taken to encourage fathers to participate. Should a large number of fathers attend, a decision will have to be made about separate or joint sessions for fathers and for mothers.

- ♦ ***Is there room for additional activities to include adolescents from outside of the Ethiopian-Israeli community?*** In all the groups of the study, the subject arose of a negative self-image, as well as a sense of alienation from Israeli society and the question of self-identity of adolescents hailing from Ethiopia and living in Israeli society. Including non-Ethiopian/Israelis in some activities may enhance the process of empowerment and identity building, and plant Ethiopian-Israeli adolescents more firmly in Israeli society.

The study findings were presented to the parties implementing and funding the program. The findings serve as a basis for meaningful discussion of the program's improvement and continuation throughout Israel.

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Ethiopian National Project	1
1.2 Program for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse	2
1.3 Study Goals	3
1.4 Study Design	3
2. Program Design	4
3. Characteristics of Adolescents in the Program	5
3.1 Socio-Economic Characteristics	5
3.2 At-Risk Behavior and Social Status	5
3.3 Scholastic Behavior and Expectations of Higher Education	7
3.4 Relationship with Parents	7
4. Program Activities	7
4.1 Strengths	9
4.2 Suggestions for Change or Improvement	10
5. Program Contributions according to the Adolescents and Families	12
5.1 Information about Drugs and Alcohol	12
5.2 Empowerment and Enhanced Sense of Self-Efficacy	14
5.3 The Child-Parent Relationship	15
5.4 Second-Year Participants	16
Sources	17

## List of Tables and Figures

Table 1: Reports by Program Adolescents on their Consuming Alcohol, by Gender	6
Figure 1: Distribution of Program for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse for 2006-08	4
Figure 2: Program Contributions as Reported by Participants	13