

**The Effects of two Components of the Aussie
Optimism Program on Social Skills**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Kaye Natalie Cuthbertson Mills

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Dedication

With love to Kieran, Breanne and Harrison

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Abstract

The relationship between social skill deficits and emotional and behavioural problems has led researchers to examine the cognitive and behavioural elements of social skill acquisition in childhood. This research aimed to compare the effectiveness of two components of the Aussie Optimism program for enhancing social behaviour in late childhood.

One hundred and twenty-eight children (68 boys and 60 girls) aged between 9 and 12 years from two schools participated in the study: (a) 34 students received the social life skills program; (b) 49 students received the optimistic thinking skills program; and (c) 45 students were assigned to a no-treatment control group.

Children were assessed with self-report and teacher-report measures of social skills, adjustment and explanatory style at pretest, posttest and three months follow-up. In addition, the relationship between these variables at pretest and health-related variables measured throughout the intervention was examined. The results indicated that the social skills program improved the social skills of participating children at posttest. No intervention effects were found for explanatory style. No intervention effects were found for teacher-rated measures of behaviour or adjustment, although in general students improved on these measures over time. Eating breakfast was associated with increased social skills, and better teacher-rated academic performance and adaptive functioning at pretest. Stressful life events were negatively correlated with academic performance and teacher-rated happiness at pretest, and higher exercise levels were associated with less teacher-rated social problems at pretest.

This research indicates that the social life skills intervention program improves the social skills of participating children in the short-term. Limitations and implications of the present findings are discussed. Further research is needed to clarify the impact of health-related variables on intervention outcomes for children.

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