

# Drug Testing in Schools

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Dr. Katja Thane  
University of Bremen  
Department of Health Sciences  
Section 6: Health and Society

Research project

## **Rationalities and Consequences of drug testing**

Simon Egbert

Monika Urban

Katja Thane

Henning Schmidt Semisch

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# Methodology

- 117 semi-structured interviews
- document analysis (125 documents)
- qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz 2012)
- School context:
  - 19 interviews with experts, pupils, teachers/staff, parents
  - 16 documents (school regulations etc.)

# Drug testing at European schools

mainly (private)  
boarding schools

usually on-site  
drug test



random testing  
and/or at suspicion

ethical and  
educational issues

## Drug Testing at (private) Boarding Schools

- ‚image campaign‘ of integrity at boarding schools
- demarcation against public schools
- economic needs
- selection of ‚suitable‘ students

“But this is definitely an important issue for the school, that on the one hand people don’t smoke weed too much or actually not at all, and that on the other hand this does not become public” (B77: 49, pupil 17y)

## My questions today

1. How are drugs and drug testing perceived?
2. Consequences of school drug testing?
3. School drug testing as a prevention strategy?

## Views on Drugs and Drug Use

“It is I think something with youth always connected is trying out, testing. And they try nicotine, they try alcohol, they also try drugs somehow. And I think they have the right to do so“ (B 65: 46, staff)

“Those hard stuff like heroin that’s shit [...]. But somebody who smokes weed he doesn’t do any harm to others” (B74: 96, pupil 19y)

“Well I do think it’s a good thing because I don’t take drugs generally because I’m against it. Because I think this loss of control in that case also is a weakness and therefore I think it’s wrong. And so I do think drug testing is a good idea” (B73: 61, pupil 16y)

# Perceptions of drug testing

“That is like I said just belongs to life in a boarding school. It is just quite normal” (B77: 54, pupil)

“so otherwise you could only threaten with the police but I think that would be bad for the relationship to the staff. And therefore I believe that it is actually quite a good measure with the drug tests” “ (B75: 56, pupil 18y)

“well it is rather a little funny if there are two teachers stand there and watch” (B78: 2, pupil 18y)

“but there are yet some pupils who are very afraid of it [drug testing]” (B79: 26, pupil 16y)

“ I have to put up this sign, not for the pupil but for the community [of the school]” (B65: 45, staff)



“The disadvantage [of school drug testing] is that you can’t take drugs. And the advantage is that you can’t take drugs” (B 74: 94, pupil 19y)

## Results 2: Consequences of drug testing

„I mean harsher punishment than getting expelled from here you can't actually threaten with“ (B75: 54, pupil 18y)

„And I have to state that very clearly: we don't give second chances“ (B47: 6, staff)

“and then I've noticed from many that they've cheated themselves through it” (B79: 22, pupil)

## Consequences of positive drug test

- Routine (weekly) testing
- School punishment
- School expulsion (often after second positive testing)
- Drug use is curbed

 provokes clandestine drug use and attempts of deception.

# Drug Prevention

- Drug testing as a drug prevention strategy
- based on deterrence
  
- New Psychoactive Substances (NPS): Information and education prevention strategies

„The platform consequently finds that the precautionary principle does not provide any arguments justifying infringement on pupils‘ private lives and interference with the school’s vocation by drug testing. Testing actually undermines the pupil-teacher relationship and the psycho-social climate in schools, which has been proven by research to have a protective function“

Pompidou Groups Platform on Ethical Issues and Professional Standards 2008

# Conclusions I

- Drug use perceived as problem behaviour, no matter the circumstances, frequency, extent (Quensel 2010)
- School drug testing is conceptualized as drug prevention strategy
- boarding schools as special setting, where school drug testing perceived as necessary by both staff and students

## Conclusions II

- Testing leads to clandestine drug use behaviour
- Practices of the self (Foucault)
- Manifestation of a repressive drug policy

Thank you very much for your attention!

thane@uni-bremen.de