DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC COMPETENCIES DURING ADOLESCENCE:
LONGITUDINAL ASSOCIATIONS WITH SYMPATHY AND PERSISTENCE
IN LATE CHILDHOOD

Grütter J., Buchmann M.

University of Zurich, Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development, Zurich, Switzerland

Keywords: Civic Competencies; Sympathy; Persistence, Adolescence

With increasing social inequalities, the role of active and engaged citizens becomes more important. Prior research has focused on the development of civic competencies in young adulthood; however, only few studies have investigated how civic competencies manifest themselves and develop at earlier stages. Those few studies suggest that civic competencies are an important developmental task of adolescence and are predicted by multiple processes in childhood. In order to shed light on these developmental antecedents of civic competencies, this four-wave study examined the role of social (i.e., sympathy) and self-regulatory competencies (i.e., persistence) from early childhood to early adolescence in the evolution of civic competencies during adolescence. Assuming that civic competencies reflects a multidimensional construct, we investigated associations of sympathy and persistence with different components of civic competencies (i.e., social justice values, perceived social and personal responsibility, informal helping, perceived efficacy to take responsibility, perceived political efficacy, and community engagement).

Based on a representative sample of 1118 Swiss children (Mage T1 = 9.26 years, SDage T1 = 0.20 years) who were interviewed in their homes every 3 years (i.e., at the ages of 9, 12, 15, and 18), findings from autoregressive and latent difference score models revealed that: a) with the exception of community engagement, civic competencies remained highly stable during adolescence and slightly increased, although there were significant individual differences between participants; b) sympathy at the age of 12 was a central positive predictor of most civic competencies during adolescence; and c) persistence at the ages of 9 and 15 positively predicted certain aspects of civic competencies (i.e., social justice values and informal helping) while persistence at the age of 12 negatively predicted community engagement.

These findings shed new light on motivational and socio-emotional developmental antecedents of different components reflecting civic engagement in adolescence.