

Health Psychology Groups in Europe



Professor Ralf Schwarzer is head of the Berlin Health Psychology Department since 1982. He is a leading expert in the area of health behaviour change, stress and coping, and social support as well as a fellow of the American Psychological Association and of the EHPS. From 1996 to 1998 Ralf was the President of the EHPS. Currently he is the President of the Health Psychology Division (Div. 8) of the International Association for Applied Psychology (IAAP) (<http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~health/iaap/>).

For more information on the Health Psychology Department of the Freie Universität Berlin visit <http://web.fu-berlin.de/gesund/e.htm>.

Health Psychology at the Freie Universität Berlin

A brief history of Health Psychology in Germany

Although research on health psychology topics and concepts has a long tradition in Germany, the discipline of Health Psychology was introduced to Germany only recently. In 1988, Ralf Schwarzer established the first Health Psychology courses at the FU Berlin. Four years later, in 1992, the Division of Health Psychology was founded within the German Psychological Society. This Division of Health Psychology organises biannual conferences and workshops. Its journal, *Zeitschrift für Gesundheitspsychologie*, founded in 1993, publishes articles quarterly.

Although Health Psychology is still a minor subject in the studies in psychology and not yet available at every University, it is growing rapidly in Germany. From 2006 on, Health Psychology will become a major component of the new M.A. programme in Clinical and Health Psychology at the FU Berlin, and other universities are to follow.

Health Psychology at the Freie Universität Berlin

The Department of Health Psychology at the Freie Universität Berlin (www.fu-berlin.de/gesund/e.htm) is amongst the research groups with the longest and most fruitful traditions in German Health Psychology.

With about 20 members, it has become the major component of the psychology at the FU Berlin. Prof. Ralf Schwarzer's team includes EHPS members Sonia Lippke, Benjamin Schüz, Amelie Wiedemann and Jochen P. Ziegelmann as well as other faculty, doctoral students and collaborators.

Collaboration and Research

The group's collaboration is interdisciplinary and international. Currently, the group is cooperating with leading institutions and departments in the UK, USA, Canada, Korea, Israel, and Switzerland. Furthermore, the Department of Health Psychology participates in two interdisciplinary Doctoral Programmes: (1) Neuropsychiatry and Psychology of Aging funded by DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgesellschaft, German Research Foundation) and (2) International Max Planck Research School: The Life Course: Evolutionary and Ontogenetic Dynamics (LIFE).

The ongoing projects in the department cover two main topics: the examination of processes and factors that promote health behaviour change; and coping with stress in the area of chronic illness and traumatic experiences.

In the area of health behaviour change, a randomized controlled trial on the promotion of interdental hygiene, two intervention studies on health behaviour change in rehabilitation patients, a study on marathon runners as well as several online studies on healthy nutrition and physical activity (<http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~gesund/plaene/>) are being conducted. The area of coping with stress is covered with a project on burn patients, a project on cancer patients undergoing surgery and a project on psychosocial correlates of halitosis (breath malodour).

Specific individual research interests are: Psychosocial factors in the treatment and course of severe burn injuries, processes of emotion regulation in borderline personality disorder, cognitive-behavioural treatment of anxiety disorders and personality disorders (Babette Renneberg); Stage theories of health behaviour change (Sonia Lippke); Mechanisms underlying food choice and their implications for health psychology (Jutta Mata); Psychosomatic patients and therapy outcome/quality of life with regard to psychosocial predictors (Gabriele Schmid); Changing health behaviours and behavioural dentistry (Benjamin Schüz); theory building in developmental health psychology and intervention design in self-regulation and successful aging (Jochen Ziegelmann).

by Urte Scholz, Benjamin Schüz & Jochen P. Ziegelmann