



# "Part of You": An Innovative Evidence Based Psychosocial Program aimed at Preventing the Development of Addictive Behaviors at Primary School Level in Greece

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**Summary:** The aim of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of an innovative program to enhance mental resilience, according to Botvin's skills model and the Project Zero program of Harvard University. This program was implemented for the first time in Greece, among primary school pupils, in order to prevent the development of addictive behaviors using art as a prevention tool. Research confirms that children aged 10 to 14 years are more vulnerable, more open to peer pressure and more likely to consider using a psychoactive substance. The transition from primary to secondary school can also create additional stress for a child, the demands and expectations are greater, and the use of a psychoactive substance or risky behavior is highly likely. The action research involved 109 pupils attending primary schools in Patras, Greece and specifically in grades 5 and 6. The results of the research instruments, using three reliable clinical scales, showed an increase in the degree of social skills and mental resilience of the pupils involved after the end of the implementation of the program and the stabilization of skills measured three months later. The effectiveness of the program is high on factors related to social and personal skills, art and psychosocial support, and information about addictive behaviors.

**KEYWORDS:** Psychosocial primary school interventions, substance use prevention

## I. Introduction

Child and adolescent mental health problems as a consequence of the dual fiscal and health crisis have changed in both quantitative and qualitative terms in Greece. For example, the latest figures published by the Centre for the Treatment of Dependent Persons (KETHEA, 2022) show that the average age of onset of psychoactive substance use is 16 years, during the period when the adolescents are attending secondary school. The data on the profile of those who sought help for internet and gaming are also striking. Nine (9) out of ten people who contacted the KETHEA detox agency for problematic internet use are males with an average age of 18.9 years, who are unemployed and live with their parental family. The majority of them (34.7%) are attending high school while 24% are attending university. The above data show that an addictive behavior can affect the life of a teenager on many levels with consequences for his/her life in the future.

The transition of students from primary to secondary education is a process with cognitive, emotional and psychosocial effects on the overall development of students. This transition affects and is

affected by students, parents and the educational community who are involved in different roles that complement each other. In this developmental phase of pre-adolescent children, students worry and think strongly about continuing to high school. They are characterized by self-centeredness and questioning of social standards as well as any form of authority. The preadolescent child tries to become independent and comes into constant conflict with his parents, whom he now openly questions.

The transition from preadolescence to adolescence that is timed with the transition from primary to secondary school can bring about some adjustment difficulties, with children feeling intense anxiety and worry about whether they will be able to meet the new demands and whether they will be accepted from their peers. Possible problem behaviors that may result from a difficult transition are school failure, dropping out of school, delinquent behaviors, the expression of violence and aggression as well as the manifestation of addictive behaviors (substance use, internet addiction) (Hanewald, 2013).

School, and especially primary school, as a powerful socializing factor, plays a very important role in the adaptation, socialization and emotional learning of the child (Babalis, 2009). It is the most important factor, after family, that contributes to the formation of the child's personality and can act as a protective factor against the emergence of high-risk behaviors later on as the Greek data confirm, such as the use of psychoactive substances or internet addiction (Kalouri-Antonopoulou & Sigalas, 2009).

According to the World Health Organization (1997), life skills are those skills that enable an individual to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Similarly, UNICEF (2012) uses the term Life Skills to refer to the set of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that help an individual to make responsible decisions, communicate effectively with others and develop self-management skills that will help them live a healthy and productive life.

The Life Skills approach seems to be the most effective intervention at the level of prevention programs within schools (Buhler & Heppenhausen, 2008) and especially in primary school classes. Other research data (Botvin, 1996; Gazioglu & Canel, 2015) show that the implementation of Life Skills learning programs with a focus on preventing the development of risky and addictive behaviors have positive results, both in the short and long term, with an apparent reduction in substance use both at an early stage of use and at an advanced stage of use.

The implementation of programs to prevent the development of addictive behaviors at all levels of education can act as a means of curbing the pupil's path to drug use. This is confirmed by the research findings of Dritsas & Theodoratou (2017) where after implementing a comprehensive prevention program, pupils stated that they acquired new skills and management mechanisms and enjoyed the whole process.

The largest number of prevention interventions at Greek schools are targeted at pupils aged 8-16 years. Children at this age are at such a level of development that they can more easily absorb new knowledge and experiences and therefore the prevention programs they participate in are more effective. Prevention interventions targeted at primary school pupils aim to improve children's psychological, emotional and social learning in order to enhance their protective factors against substance use (Lalongo et al., 2001). Emphasis is placed on creating an appropriate school climate that supports the strengthening of protective factors and provides opportunities to improve relationships between members of the school community. Self-control, empathy, problem solving, recognition of emotions, interpersonal relationships are the main objectives of the interventions in the primary school.

These programs implemented in Greece focused on the identification of the causes of addiction, seeking to promote the general psychosocial health of young people through active educational processes (Kokkevi et al., 1992). Initially, early prevention programs used more of a preaching approach and the introduction of information about the harms of drugs and addictions in general. That is, they were based on creating a sense of fear in children and adolescents in order to prevent them from getting involved in dangerous situations and engaging in some addictive behavior (Griffin & Botvin, 2010). Over time, however, prevention programs began to focus on enhancing pupils' mental resilience and life skills, using experiential methods, and emphasizing the protective and aggravating factors that can lead a pupil to an addictive experimentation.

The majority of such psychoactive substance prevention programs take place in the school setting and are part of Health Education activities. Teachers have the opportunity to help pupils in a meaningful way to form real perceptions about substance use by providing both appropriate information on the subject, and by applying teaching methods that will empower them throughout their lives. A positive school environment and school success are predictors of avoiding substance use initiation (American Legacy Foundation, 2002). Thus, the inclusion within the school curriculum of prevention activities will substantially help pupils in this direction.

In all of the above process, the use of art may be an effective tool to enhance the skills that a pupil will have in his/her toolbox in order to be mentally resilient and prevent the occurrence of risky behaviors. Critical thinking is an active process, with metacognitive characteristics, it is shaped and developed based on pupils' experiences, part of which are shaped within the educational context (Mega, 2011). Exposure to all forms of art can be an effective tool in this direction as it can contribute to personal development and the formation of healthy values and attitudes towards life.

Thus, the use of art in education is an endeavor of exceptional educational value for the pupil. The utilization of visual arts in school and activities involving engagement with art improves pupils' attitudes towards school and contributes to their overall academic success (Bamford, 2006).

Engagement with artworks is recognised as an educational practice that has a liberatory perspective (Kokkos, 2017). Within this context, the educational process involves a radical reassessment and change of dysfunctional beliefs through the process of critical reflection and alternative ways of learning (ibid.). Perkins (1994) argues that through the observation of a work of art the pupil is gradually led to activate his reflection on serious life issues. Perkins' methodology has significantly influenced the use of artworks in the educational process. In recent years, programs aimed at developing critical reflection among learners in the context of formal education have been continuously developed. The best known program is Visible Thinking and in particular the Artful Thinking program of Project Zero at Harvard University.

From the above literature review it is clear that the implementation of programs to prevent the development of addictive behaviors is considered necessary in the school context as a means of strengthening the mental resilience and life skills of pupils, in the context of their all-round personality development. On the other hand, art can be integrated within this context as a tool to support the effectiveness of prevention program as it contributes to the development of very important skills in pupils. The "pArt of you" program described below is an innovation in the field of Health Education and the already existing programs implemented by the official institutions within schools, as from the review of the literature there is no program aimed at preventing the development of addictive behaviors that specifically uses art as a tool to help achieve the individual objectives of the program. The need for innovative practices in the field of health promotion, led us to design this new program which for the first time is implemented in schools of Greece, aiming to bring a new perspective and positive results in the field of the prevention of addictive behaviors.

### **The pArt of you project**

The "pArt of you" program is an integrated psychosocial support program aimed at preventing high-risk behaviors and is addressed to children in pre-adolescence. It consists of 8 weekly two-hour sessions. Its pedagogical and scientific framework is based on the Life Skills Development model and the principles of Resilience. It is aimed at 5th and 6th grade pupils who are in the transitional phase of pre-adolescence.

The program aims, through an experiential approach and using art as a tool of prevention, to help pupils:

- gain knowledge about addictive and high-risk behaviors, such as addictive substances, excessive gambling, high-risk online behaviors.
- enable them to acquire skills that will shield them psychologically against the above challenges (such as developing healthy self-esteem, resistance strategies, managing relationships and emotions, cultivating critical thinking, etc.)

-to acquire a positive way of thinking that will motivate them to adopt attitudes and behaviors that ensure a healthy and balanced life.

Table 1. describes the content and objectives of each meeting of the program.

**Table 1. Content and objectives of program's meetings.**

| MEETINGS               | CONTENTS  |
|------------------------|---|
| Preliminary meeting    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting to know the pupils</li> <li>• Administration of the questionnaire</li> </ul>   |
| 1 <sup>n</sup> Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting to know the group of pupils</li> <li>• Information about the pArt of you project</li> <li>• Emergence of desires</li> <li>• Team contract composition</li> </ul>   |
| 2 <sup>n</sup> Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To inform pupils about the concept of addiction</li> <li>• Discuss the causes that may lead someone to substance use or other addictive behaviors</li> <li>• Understand the concept of aggravating and protective factors</li> <li>• Understand the concept of peer influence</li> </ul> |
| 3 <sup>n</sup> Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing pupils' self-awareness</li> <li>• Strengthening decision-making skills</li> <li>• Peer influence</li> </ul>   |
| 4 <sup>n</sup> Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of the sense of freedom</li> <li>• Goals - dreams</li> </ul>   |
| 5 <sup>n</sup> Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening the skill of making good decisions</li> <li>• Distinction of limits</li> </ul>   |
| 6 <sup>n</sup> Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotion management</li> <li>• Development of teamwork-cooperation-integration skills</li> </ul>  |
| 7 <sup>n</sup> Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotion management</li> <li>• Developing problem-solving skills</li> </ul>   |
| 8 <sup>n</sup> Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program closure</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> </ul>   |
| Final Meeting          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administration of the questionnaire</li> </ul>   |

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Objectives of the Research

The aim of this project is to design, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of a targeted program for the prevention of addictive behaviors in primary schools, which will use art as a tool to enhance pupils' mental resilience and life skills.

### Research hypotheses

The working hypotheses investigated were formulated as follows:

- a) Personal and social skills of primary school pupils are expected to be enhanced through their participation in the intervention.
- b) The degree of pupils' resilience is expected to be enhanced through their participation in the intervention.
- c) The implementation of the integrated psychosocial support program is positively evaluated by the pupils involved.

- d) The degree of development of personal and social skills of primary school pupils involved is related to the pupils' gender.
- ε) The degree of development of personal and social skills of primary school pupils involved is related to the class the pupils attend.
- f) The degree of mental resilience of primary school pupils involved is related to the class or grade the pupils attend.
- g) The degree of development of mental resilience of primary school pupils involved is related to the pupils' gender.

#### **Research Instruments**

The impact of the implementation of an integrated psychosocial support program for primary school pupils was measured with three questionnaires.

##### **A. The CYRM (Child and Youth Resilience Measure)**

The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-26) was used to assess the resilience of the pupils participating in the research process and was translated into Greek using the reverse translation method. The CYRM-26 is a self-report tool that assesses the resources (individual, relational, social and cultural) available to the individual that can enhance resilience. The manufacturers give a Cronbach's alpha = .82 reliability rating.

##### **B. the SSRS-C (Social Skills Rating System).**

The Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Gresham & Elliot, 1990) was used to assess pupils' social skills. This is a comprehensive self-report system for assessing the social behavior of pupils in childhood, pre-adolescence and adolescence (pupil version) and also a self-report (teacher and parent version). The manufacturers of the instrument report high internal reliability on the four subscales with a Cronbach's mean of 0.94.

##### **C. Effectiveness evaluation questionnaire**

An outcome evaluation questionnaire was administered, which measured the benefits participants gained from their participation in the program.

The outcome evaluation questionnaire assesses the extent to which the intended objectives of the interventions coincide with the benefits that participants consider they have gained. The questionnaire was subjected to exploratory factor analysis using principal components and Varimax-type rotation based on the sample of participants i.e. the pupils who participated in the program. As a whole, the study is characterized by a high degree of reliability, as in a total of 16 variables, the Cronbach's alpha reliability is 0.855.

#### **Research Sample**

The sample of the present study consists of 109 primary school pupils, specifically pupils who attend the last two grades of primary school, the fifth and sixth grades. Regarding their gender, approximately half of the pupils were girls (N=54[49.5%]) and the remaining pupils were boys (N=55[50.5%]) at the age of 11-12 years (Mean = 11.3, SD = 0.486). The pupils were selected after convenience sampling in random primary schools of general education in the city of Patras, which is the third largest city in Greece.

### **III. RESULTS**

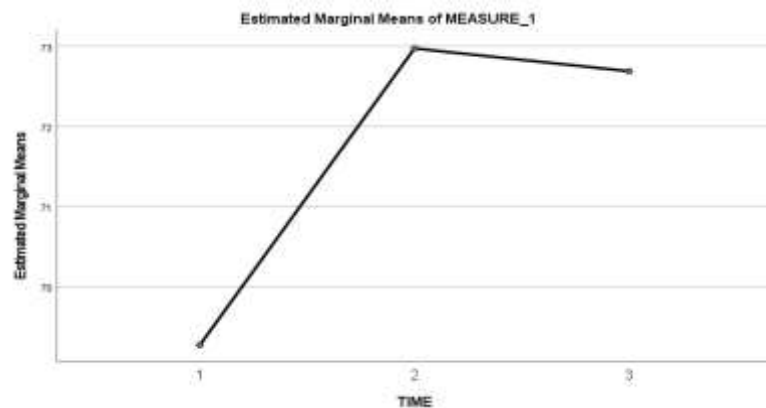
The statistical package SPSS v.28 was used for the statistical analysis of the data. The following are the results of the analyses of variance aimed at investigating the effect of the psychosocial program implemented on primary school pupils and the analysis was conducted through Repeated Measures ANOVA.

#### **1. Effect of psychosocial support program on the degree of pupils' Mental Resilience**

From the results of the data analysis, we can see the high level of statistical significance before, after the intervention and three months later, that was observed in the mean scores of the pupils' Mental Resilience

score. The statistical test shows that the «pArt of you» program has a positive effect on the pupils' Mental Resilience score as the Mental Resilience score not only increased but also remained consistently higher than the initial measurement. From the pairwise comparison made (utilizing the Bonferroni correction), we observe that the difference in means between the three measures is statistically significant. The mean of the follow-up measurement (three months after the intervention) appears to have a slight decrease and the difference is statistically significant ( $p=.003$ ) from the mean of the measurement immediately after the end of the intervention, but remains higher than the mean of the pre-intervention measurement.

**Table 2. Effect of psychosocial support program on the degree of pupils' Mental Resilience**



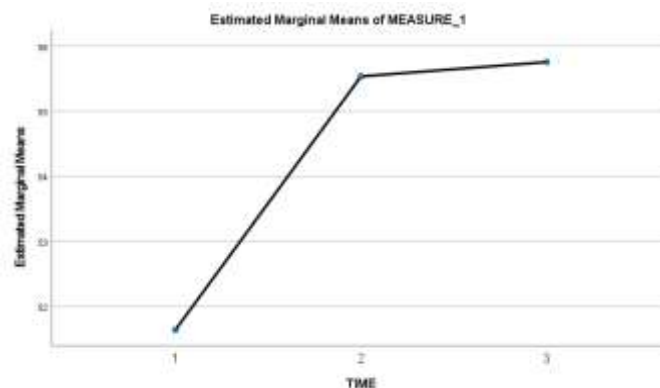
## **2. Effect of the implementation of the psychosocial support program "pArt of you" on the degree of pupils' Social and Personal Skills**

After the statistical analysis of the SSRS-C questionnaires, we can see the high level of statistical significance before, immediately after the intervention and three months after that was observed in the mean scores of the personal and social skills of the pupils who participated in the program.

The statistical test shows that the «pArt of you» program also has a positive effect on the degree of social skills of the pupils.

From the pairwise comparison made (using the Bonferroni correction), we observe that the difference in means between the three measurements is statistically significant. The mean of the follow-up measurement (three months after the intervention) seems to have a slight increase and the difference is not statistically significant ( $p=.172$ ) from the mean of the measurement immediately after the end of the intervention, but it remains higher than the mean of the pre-intervention measurement.

**Table 3. Effect of psychosocial support program on the degree of pupils' Social and Personal Skills**



## **3. The role of Demographic Characteristics of pupils who participated in the psychosocial support program on the degree of pupils' Mental Resilience and Social and Personal Skills**

Regarding the effect of the factor Class and Gender aggregated on the degree of Mental Resilience and the social and personal skills of the pupils, an independent samples t-test was implemented to examine the effect of the class attended by the pupils who participated in the program (5th and 6th) on the percentage change in the degree of Mental Resilience and the percentage change in the degree of Mental Resilience before and 3 months after the end of the intervention. Analysis using the independent samples t-test showed no statistically significant differences between genders in the intervention group or pupils attending the two classes.

#### **4. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the psychosocial support program "pArt of you"**

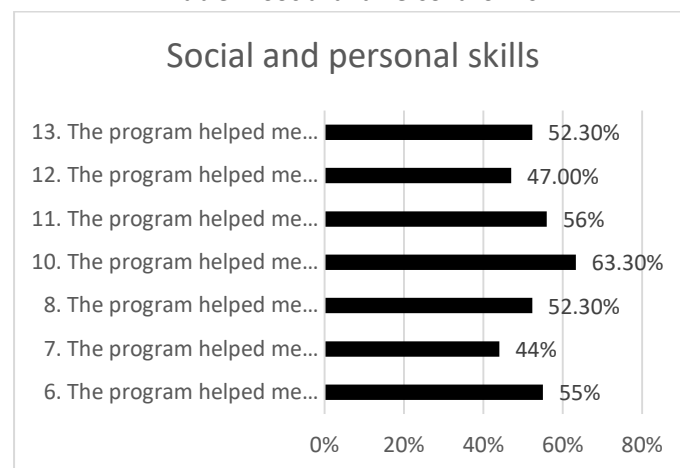
The questionnaire "Evaluation of the effectiveness of the psychosocial support program "pArt of you" was subjected to exploratory factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis as factors extraction method based on Eigenvalues > 1 and Varimax with Kaiser Normalization as Rotation Method. . The results as obtained from the statistical analysis by factor are described below.

##### **4.1.Descriptive analysis of results by factor**

##### **4.1.1.Social and Personal Skills**

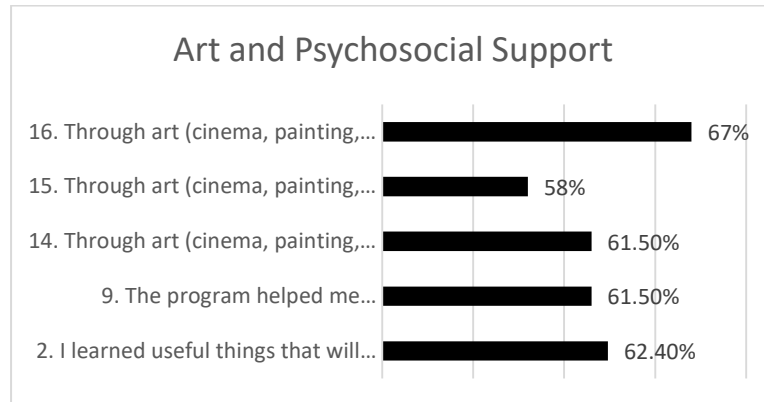
The results of the Social and Personal Skills analyses are described in Table 4, based on the responses of the pupils who participated in the project. The majority of pupils report that the program helped them develop social and personal skills such as being able to cooperate more with their classmates and feeling more confident in themselves.

**Table 4. Social and Personal Skills**

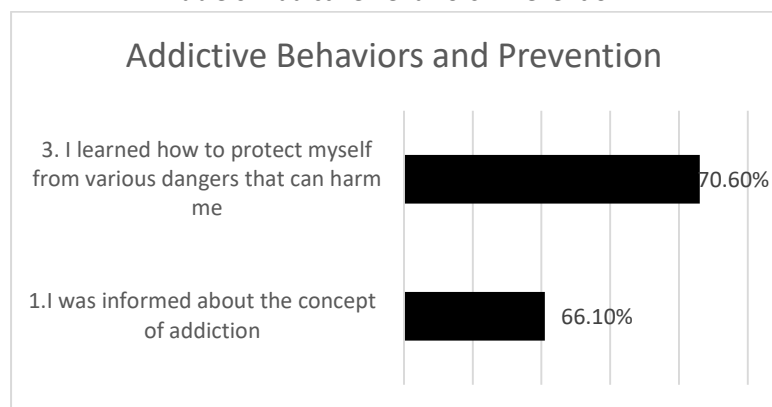


##### **4.1.2.Art and Psychosocial Support**

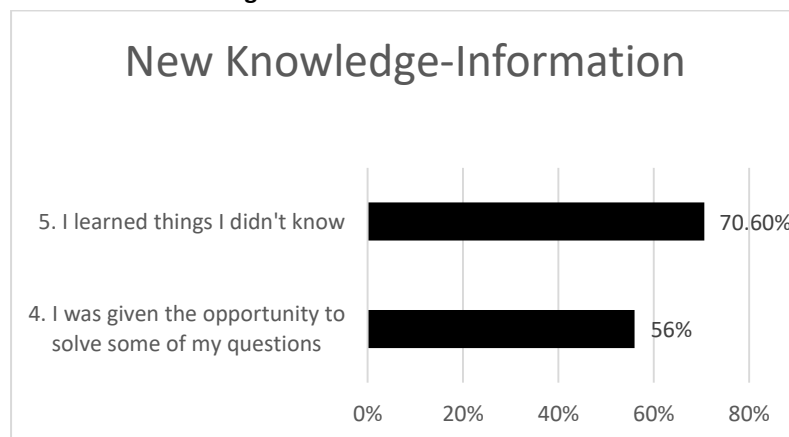
The results of the analyses for the Art and Psychosocial Support factor are presented in Table 5. Most of the pupils' report that through the use of art they were able to think better about things that concern their lives and express their feelings more.

**Table 5. Art and Psychosocial Support****4.1.3. Addictive Behaviors - Prevention**

The results of the analyses for the Dependent Behaviors-Prevention factor are described in table 6. The majority of pupils answered that through the program they learned how to protect themselves from risks and to be informed about addictions.

**Table 6. Addictive Behaviors - Prevention****4.1.4. New knowledge-Information**

The results of the analyses for the factor New Knowledge-Information are described in Table 7. Pupils report that they learned things they did not know and were able to solve questions about issues that generally concern their lives.

**Table 7. New Knowledge-Information**



#### IV. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of an innovative psychosocial support program for primary school pupils, aiming to prevent the development of addictive behaviors.

According to the latest data from EPIPSY for adolescents before the pandemic, cannabis use was much higher than 12 years ago. This is a trend that, if reversed, is expected to contribute to a further increase in the number of young adults who will in future be referred to specialist services for cannabis and/or other substance use problems. EKTEPN (2022) data show that in recent years approximately 1000 people have been referred annually to treatment services for cannabis use problems, with a steadily increasing trend over the past 10 years.

The innovation of the program lies in the use of art as a tool to enhance pupils' mental resilience and life skills on a personal, psychological and social level. Aiming to study the differentiation of the degree of mental resilience but also of the pupils' personal and social skills after the end of the program, the necessary measurements with psychometric tools were made before the beginning of the program, after the end of the program and three months after the end.

The results of our research seem to be quite encouraging regarding the effectiveness of the **pArt of you** psychosocial support program in preventing the development of addictive behaviors in primary school pupils.

Regarding the degree of mental resilience after statistical analysis of the data, it appears that there was a statistically significant difference in the measurements before and after the implementation of the program. Furthermore, in the measurements taken three months later it appeared that the increase in the degree of mental resilience was maintained at higher levels than initially and stabilized at this level. It seems that after participating in the pArt of you program, the pupils showed a higher degree of resilience in individual skills related to personal and social level as well as skills related to peer interaction. The relationship with their caregivers seemed to improve both on a psychological level and on a physical care level. Statistically significant is also the variation in the degree of pupils' psychological resilience in areas related to the general context of their lives such as spiritual, educational and cultural level.

Research in the scientific field of education highlights the importance of Mental Resilience as a powerful protective factor that promotes pupils' mental and spiritual health (Benard, 2004; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Ungar, 2012; 2018; Cowen et al., 1997). Mental Resilience contributes to maintaining pupils' mental health and preventing the development of problematic as well as addictive behaviors in childhood and adolescence (Dray et al., 2015; Kessler et al., 2008). Children with a high degree of Mental Resilience are less likely to develop mental health problems such as depression or anxiety, problems that may lead them to addictive behaviors in the future. Studies investigating the effectiveness of prevention programs within schools aimed at enhancing Mental Resilience highlight the benefits that pupils gain through participation in such interventions such as stress management, social and emotional skills as well as skills to manage difficult emotions that can lead to anxiety, depression and risky behaviours (Cefai et al., 2018b; Fenwick-Smith et al., 2018; Meschke & Patterson, 2003; Twum-Antwi et al., 2019; Ungar, 2018).

The same conclusion is reached by Graczyk, Domitrovich & Zins (2003) who argue that the participation of pupils in psychoeducation programs in school helps them to manage in a functional way any feelings of distress they may experience, which contributes to their mental empowerment and mental resilience.

Regarding the differentiation of pupils' social skills after the implementation, we observe a statistically significant difference as the measurements show an increase, maintenance and stabilization of pupils' skills related to personal, social and life skills. Specifically, in the areas of empathy, assertiveness, cooperation and self-control, pupils show an improved score after the implementation of the program as well as a stabilization of these three months later. The results of the study agree with those of Baurda (2018) where after the implementation of a psychosocial support program for primary school pupils, it was shown that the pupils were able to improve their self-esteem and increase their social skills to a significant extent as well.

The implementation of primary prevention programs in school seems to support all children at a universal level, helping them to acquire social skills with which they can meet the demands and daily difficulties of life (Angeli & Vlachou, 2011; Psyllou, 2014). Training pupils in coping and management techniques is associated with increased social skills as well as better social adjustment (Kazdin & Weisz, 1998; Pincus & Friedman, 2004).

Similar research in the field shows that the implementation of psychosocial support and prevention programs in both primary and secondary education is effective and leads to an increase in pupils' personal and social skills (Segal, 1983). Skills such as emotion management, problem and conflict resolution, stress reduction, decision making, are increased through pupils' participation in prevention programs, thus reducing the risk of developing an addictive or risky behavior (Elias et al., 1986; Forman, 1993; King et al., 1998; Robson et al., 1995).

Wanting to test the effect of pupils' demographic characteristics on the variation in the degree of mental resilience and social skills, it appeared that there was no statistically significant difference. The results are consistent with the findings of other studies showing that participation of primary school pupils in prevention and psychosocial support programs in school brings the same results regardless of the pupil's gender or age and they benefit equally in developing their mental resilience and social skills within your program (Metsäpelto et al, 2010; Coelho et al., 2016; Eisenberg et al., 2006; Flannery & Smith, 2017; Thurber et al., 2007; Vassilopoulos et al., 2013).

The above findings can be confirmed by the evaluation of the effectiveness of the program, which was carried out by the pupils themselves at the end of the program. The majority of pupils state that it helped them to feel more confident in themselves, to express some of their problems and to learn more about themselves. They also state that it helped them to cooperate more with their classmates, participate more in group activities as well as to bond more with their friends.

Through their participation in the program, pupils say that it helped them to learn about the concept of addiction and to learn to protect themselves from various risks that can harm them. Finally, through the program the pupils had the opportunity to solve some of their questions as well as to learn things they did not know, such as learning about the stages of addiction, new forms of addiction such as internet or gaming addiction, etc.

From the above it can be seen that the implementation of the *pArt of you* program had a positive impact on both the mental resilience and life skills of the pupils who participated in it.

Also, similar research in Britain seems to agree with the above findings and the effects of the programs on the self-esteem of the participating pupils. Enhanced self-esteem is valued as a protective factor against peer pressure, which contributes to individuality and independence, establishing attitudes and behaviors negative towards substance use (Miller, 1988). Bartz (1983, argues for the importance of enhancing self-esteem through processes that strengthen pupils' skills and encourage cooperation.

Regarding how they evaluate the use of art, pupils say that through the project and the use of art they learned useful things that will help them in their everyday life (for example, through viewing specific works of art they learned how they can use technology to their advantage) and were able to express their opinions more. By using art (film, painting, music, etc.) they were able to understand more about the topics we were discussing and were able to express more emotions. Finally, through art they started to think more about things in their lives.

The use of art contributes to the process of awareness and acceptance of the concepts of diversity and empathy. The results of the research show that art can contribute to the enhancement, full awareness and acceptance of the concepts of diversity and empathy, especially in the field of education and during the learning process. In addition, art can play an important role in education as a tool for the development of critical thinking.

The above is in line with the findings of the studies of Tsanoula (2017) and Karra (2015). It seems that the use of art can help pupils to develop social and personal skills, increase their level of mental resilience as well as their level of critical thinking. Factors that will help him to develop positive attitudes,

behaviors and a similar worldview that will act as a wall of protection and prevention against situations that may lead him to make dangerous decisions for his life, such as addictions.

Eutsler (2017) found that through the use of art in school intervention programs, pupils developed a greater degree of critical thinking. Pupils who learn to think critically can better utilize the skills they already possess, make good life decisions, and ultimately protect themselves from dangerous situations. Mazur (2017) highlights art as a vehicle for developing children's self-esteem through the implementation of targeted psychosocial support programs, the formation of an integrated personality that will lead the pupil with a healthy life path. Through art and its benefits, the pupil becomes emotionally empowered and can cope with life's difficulties with greater flexibility and avoid choosing behaviors that can harm them such as addictions (Farrington et al., 2019; Stride et al., 2015).

At this point and on the researcher's professional status as a social worker, it is important to mention that social work interventions within the school context can strengthen pupils' social and psychological skills and the educational system as a whole. Through such interventions, it is possible to cultivate abilities related to feelings, thinking and a better understanding of oneself and others.

From the above and based to the data of our research, we can argue that the participation of primary school pupils in psychosocial support programs that aim to strengthen life skills and prevent the development of risky or addictive behaviors is beneficial as it promotes their mental health and protects them from psychological or behavioral problems (Cuijpers et al., 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Reddy et al., 2009) and art can be an effective tool in this direction. The psychosocial support program "pArt of you", although piloted, seems to have a positive impact in the field of pupils' mental resilience and life skills development, as through its innovative nature of utilizing art as a prevention tool, it can contribute substantially and effectively to the goals and objectives of preventing the development of addictive behaviors.

## V. Research limitations

The period during which the present study was conducted was an extremely difficult period not only for the educational community but also for the society as a whole as the Covid-19 pandemic had paralyzed everything and the constraints were too many. Having already cancelled one school year of the study, as schools were closed for most of it, it was also difficult to ensure that the study could be conducted in the 2021-2022 school year. Teachers and school principals were extremely cautious as they had two years of work to make up for, did not know if schools would stay open and how the year would continue. There were also many restrictions on pupil participation in the program, with distances to be maintained and a ban on physical contact between pupils. The use of the mask also did not facilitate non-verbal communication. In subsequent research, it would be appropriate to include a larger sample of students with heterogeneous characteristics in order to establish on a larger scale the benefits of the "pArt of you" program.

## VI. Conclusions

As Tsiantis and Pavlopoulos (2000) argue, the school aims to support pupils in appropriate ways so that pupils follow a steady developmental path. Both the school and teachers can help the pupil to promote mental balance and well-being as well as to develop a functional degree of sociability and smooth adjustment (Leontari, 1996).

Especially nowadays, it seems that Greek children face difficulties at various levels of their lives, which affect them greatly and the consequences of which play an important role in shaping their personality. The decline of moral values in today's societies, loose family ties, emotional detachment, and the development of technology and the difficulty of creative engagement with it, socio-economic conditions are issues that children have to face from an early age, issues that affect their mental resilience, the development of life skills that will shield them against risks.

The implementation of universal prevention programs in schools aim to empower and support pupils to have a greater degree of self-awareness, to be able to objectively assess their value as human beings and to deal effectively with life's adversities. The prevention interventions linked to the implementation of the science of social work aim at the development of mutual support and solidarity between groups of students, the strengthening of self-awareness and self-esteem skills as well as the improvement of the feeling of "belonging" within the educational system (Kandylaki, 2009).

**pArt of you** is an integrated proposal of a psychosocial support program for primary school pupils designed with all the conditions and principles that prevention is based on (HKTEPN, 2011). It seems to have positive results in terms of its objectives, namely the enhancement of mental resilience and the acquisition of personal, social and psychological skills, skills that will protect them from the onset of addictive behavior. Its innovative feature, the use of art as a tool for strengthening mental resilience and life skills, adds further support to the program, giving it a special character and diversity. Art in all its forms can give pupils an impetus to be able to express themselves freely, develop their imagination, become creative, collaborative, open their horizons, learn new things through a less technical way of transmitting knowledge and information, and ultimately develop in an intellectual and integrated way into strong, autonomous personalities, who will have in their hands tools that will keep them away from addictive behaviors.

Finally, it would be equally important for the «pArt of you» psychosocial support program to be included in the recognized programs of the Pedagogical Institute and to start being implemented in schools on a larger scale in order to further evaluate its benefits and effectiveness. The training of teachers as well as prevention staff is also deemed necessary, as the role of specialists and teachers as counsellors in promoting the mental health of pupils is particularly important.

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