INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the possible health relevant predictive effects of personality characteristics in adolescence. Two important fields in adolescent research are brought together in the realms of this study: the Big Five Model and the competence oriented school-focused primary prevention. A multifactorial approach is applied to investigate the relationship between these two scientific domains.

In this introduction an overview is provided over the subsequent chapters, and the relation between the different segments and topics will be explained. This introduction should be understood as an entry to the thesis, and therefore concentrates only on the main guidelines and on the explanation of the underlying connections between the particular topics and chapters.

In the following, the relationship between personality characteristics and health relevant behavior is discussed in the framework of a multifactorial school-focused primary prevention program with adolescents. This work investigates health relevant behavioral aspects and personality with 10 to 12 years old young adolescent students in a longitudinal primary prevention study that was conducted in Dortmund, Germany. The study comprises a three years period of time, between 1995 and 1997, and was coordinated by the Sonderforschungsbereich 227 of the Universität Bieleleld in Germany.

This research provides an opportunity to study health related intervention effects of longitudinal prevention in adolescence from a personality psychological point of view. This work is the first study where personality characteristics were assessed with a Big Five personality inventory, namely the "Five Factor Personality Inventory" (FFPI; Hendriks, Hofstee & De Raad, 1999) in relation to health behavior in adolescence. It has been investigated whether the relationships between health and personality in adulthood can be replicated in early adolescence, or, if the relationships in adults cannot be replicated, what other relationships can be observed in this special age group. The results may facilitate the

detection and prevention of health problems in a school environment. If personality characteristics play a role in the development of unhealthy behavior of adolescents, teachers can also detect whether some adolescents are at risk and so provide them help and support before their unhealthy behavior stabilizes.

Adolescents between the ages of 10 to 12 base the present study on self-reports. Thus far, in the majority of the developmental personality studies, parents or teachers rated subjects at this age. The FFPI with its short and simple item formulations, especially applicable for a younger age group, provides as excellent opportunity to ask young subjects directly.

This thesis aims to contribute to the research and praxis in health sciences and personality with its theoretically oriented problem analysis and practical relevant research results. The following presentation of new developmentally relevant findings also aims to facilitate research both in personality and in developmental psychology. On the basis of these findings, more effective and better focused prevention efforts may be developed.

In the following a short overview is provided on the two scientifically approaches that form the fundament of this work. One is the Big Five approach to personality and the other the life-skills approach to prevention. The Big Five approach to personality presupposes that the differences in personality between individuals become encoded in the language and so can be filtered out and systematically presented in a taxonomy of personality descriptors. The lexically oriented investigation was conducted in many languages and countries and provided five basic dimensions of personality that are known as the Big Five personality factors. Which personality dimensions are meant when we talk about the Big Five? The results of the lexical orientation (see De Raad, 2000) and the questionnaire centered trait approach (McCrae & Costa, 1987) showed, that personality relevant traits build five major factors that are called Extraversion (open, lively), Agreeableness (flexible, generous), Conscientiousness (trustworthy, conscientious), Emotional Stability (well-balanced, stable) and Intellect / Autonomy / Openness to Experience (independent, intelligent, curious). Although the traits

subsumed under these factors may undergo several changes by adulthood, the Big Five dimensions provide a suitable frame in developmental personality research.

The present thesis starts with an overview of the most important characteristics of primary prevention in adolescence, and pays special attention to the life-skills oriented prevention. Secondly, the developmental personality characteristics are summarized from a Big Five dominated point of view, and finally, the first chapter ends with the introduction of the research questions.

The second chapter deals with the methodological characteristics of the study, presents the subjects, and describes the method and the longitudinal design of the prevention program and project. Finally, the adaptation of the personality measure for the adolescent sample is included in this part of the thesis.

In chapter 3, the empirical results are presented regarding the personality measure, the relationships between the Big Five personality variables and psychosomatic complaints, smoking, and alcohol consumption in adolescence.

Lastly, in chapter 4 the major results of the thesis are summarized, answers to the research questions are formulated and perspectives for further investigations are offered.