

Parenting Programme

Subjects: Nursing

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Parenting programmes are important ways to contribute to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient society. They benefit parents by reducing signs of stress and depression and increasing their self-efficacy and social behaviour, which leads to positive changes in childcare. In addition, they bring benefits to the parent–child relationship by relieving social pressure from parents, allowing a focus on the relationship with the child as an individual. Parenting programmes also positively affect society through knowledge sharing, networking, and support so that children can grow up in healthy environments and maximise their full potential.

Keywords: parental stress ; parenting education ; child development ; family health

1. Introduction

Healthy development during childhood promotes vigorous adulthood, contributing to a productive and sustainable society. A family household is where children establish first relationships, attachment, and continuous interaction, learn to trust and become acquainted with basic social rules ^[1]. However, it is also where most child abuse occurs, often caused by a parent ^{[2][3][4][5][6]}. This toxic stress impact on the early years triggers adverse adulthood outcomes and shortens life expectancy ^{[7][8][9][10]}.

Different kinds of stress can be induced: positive, tolerable, and toxic. The first is a normal part of healthy functioning; the second is more intense and long-lasting but can be buffered by supportive relations allowing the nervous system to get back on track; toxic stress arises from prolonged adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as reiterated abuse, chronic neglect, exposure to violence, or accumulated economic hardship in the family ^[8].

Parents and family are those closest to the child and are expected to be the best caregivers ^[11]. However, cumulative toxic stress can occur without appropriate parental support, which may cause development disruption ^[12] and promote morbidity before adulthood and early death ^{[8][12]}.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put children and caregivers at even higher risk by promoting inequalities with long-term impacts ^{[12][13]}. Studies show that this abrupt change in daily life harms the individual's mental health and increases depression and anxiety ^[13]. Chronic stress, due to adversity, lays a foundation for adverse outcomes in both physical and mental health since it generates an inadequate response of inflammation from the nervous system that affects the metabolic and immune systems deeply ^{[7][8][12]} without proper backing.

Early childhood development (ECD) science explains that the factors that influence health outcomes and the achievement of development potential depend not only on biological or behavioural characteristics but also on the experience and environment in which the child develops ^{[14][15][16]}.

Additionally, the 4.2 Goal Target of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal is “to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education” ^[17]. However, the current policy landscape has not yet resulted in the implementation of large-scale national parenting programmes. Thus, more scientific research is needed to adapt and deliver parenting programmes in diverse local contexts, coordinate within existing systems and services, fund programmes to be cost-effective and sustainable, and scale-up parenting programmes while maintaining quality and effectiveness ^[18].

Effective parenting is critical in fostering healthy child development ^[19] and responsive care, which is the caregiver's ability to understand the child's needs and respond appropriately, promoting growth and buffering stress response. However, for some parents, a social support network, parental education and support programmes are essential. Thus, parental education and support programmes that strengthen informal social support networks are needed ^[20].

There are three theoretical models, which are complementary and interconnected: the child-centred care model, the family-centred care model and the nurturing care framework.

The child-centred care model places the children and their interests as the care focus ^[21]. The parenting programmes to be developed must have this purpose, considering they seek to support the family in promoting the child's well-being.

Naturally, that parenting programmes aimed at parents of children up to 3 years old need to be based on a family-centred care philosophy approach that respects the specificity of each family, informs them, increases their literacy, and helps to support the decisions that best suit their needs and contexts ^[22].

The Nurturing Care Framework "provides strategic directions for supporting the holistic development of children from pregnancy up to age 3" ^[15]. This emphasises the importance of early childhood development and the components of nurturing care that should be present in parenting programmes: good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, opportunities for early learning and security and safety.

The brain is particularly receptive to experience during the early development phase. Investing in this period is one of the best ways to eliminate inequality, boost shared prosperity and create human capital for economic growth ^{[15][23]}.

2. Parenting Programme

2.1. Benefits of Parenting Programmes

Parenting programmes can increase parenting competence, skills and practices ^{[24][25][26]}, self-efficacy ^[27] and parents' knowledge about children's temperament and developmental stages ^{[26][28]}. It also enabled the strengthening of social support ^{[25][27]} and the way to solve children's conduct problems ^{[26][29]}. The demonstration of various feelings of stress and frustration concerning day-to-day parenting was also reported as one of the benefits of the parental programme ^[30].

Moreover, parenting programmes can reduce stress ^{[24][31]} and depression ^{[24][27]}.

Parents reported that the parenting programme relieved societal pressure on parents, allowing them to focus on their relationships with their children. Parents also referred that parenting programmes made it easier for them to understand their children as individuals with their interests and feelings ^[24] and contributed to child-parent behavioural changes ^[28].

Parenting programmes can have benefits that transcend the family nucleus. Parents shared concepts, strategies, and attitudes among themselves, family members, friends, teachers, and day-care providers ^[32]. Other benefits of parenting programmes, such as the better utilisation of child health care resources ^[19] and a reduction in unplanned consultations and readmissions ^[33].

2.2. Structure of a Parenting Programme for Parents of Children up to 3 Years of Age

Motivational interviewing may be essential in promoting participants' engagement efforts in parenting interventions ^[34] and the coherence between the contents and methodology toward target parents' needs and conditions ^[35]. A structured curriculum in a programme geared towards providing play and social opportunities was associated with better enrolment than the more typical structured parent group ^[35].

Factors that contributed to positive experiences included: access for future reference and content more specific to the child's age and more sortable ^[32], consistency and continuity between programme modules, using concrete examples to demonstrate concepts, supportive facilitators and group companions, providing childcare, using concrete examples to illustrate parenting concepts, and flexibility in programme delivery ^[26].

2.3. Facilitators of Parenting Programmes

Including children in the sessions was mentioned in the studies as a facilitating aspect ^[24]. Another facilitating aspect reported by parents was the existence of weekly challenges set, adapted to each one's reality, to practice the strategies learned ^[24].

The use of digital technologies and information in digital format was another aspect that parents considered facilitating the parenting programme ^{[24][32]}. Accessible content using pictures to promote understanding of the content by less literate mothers ^[28] and focused on strategies that parents can experiment ^[30] were also identified as facilitator factors.

Parents reported that the reward system integrated into the programme was an essential motivator for participation [32]. Studies indicate that providing an in-home coach could help vulnerable parents identify and overcome practical barriers [35]. The existence of group facilitators [35] and peer support groups [30] contributed to supporting parents' active participation.

2.4. Potential Barriers to a Parenting Programme

Two main themes emerged concerning barriers to autonomy-supporting parenting practices: (1) lack of empowerment to influence children's preferences; and (2) stress, fatigue, or lack of time can make parenting challenging. Parents indicated that they had difficulty applying this knowledge. They wanted guidance on translating their knowledge into effective strategies [30].

Time lost was the most common barrier [32]. Parents stated that the many demands placed on them throughout the day made it difficult to "cope" or handle challenges as they arose, particularly at the end of the day. Parents also expressed not having enough time or being too tired to use supportive parenting practices [30]. Suppose the parenting programme is planned to be face-to-face. In that case, the distance between families and parenting centres is essential to be aware of because geographical distance remains a significant barrier to participation in the programme [36].

Technical problems hindering participation have also been reported, such as the requirement of work email addresses during registration, and insufficient internet network, among others [32].

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