



# The effectiveness of a parenting education program based on respected parents & respected children for mothers of preschool-aged children



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Respected Parents & Respected Children (RPRC) parenting education program for mothers of preschool-aged children in South Korea. A total of 99 mothers were assigned to an intervention group ( $n = 54$ ) or a control group ( $n = 45$ ). Mothers in the intervention group received 16 weekly sessions of the parenting education program and then were compared with mothers who did not take part in the program. Questionnaires were used to assess parenting characteristics (i.e., maternal depression and anger, parenting behavior, co-parenting, parenting efficacy, and parenting stress) at baseline (pre-test), immediately after the termination of the program (post-test), and 8 months after the end of the program (follow-up test). Maternal rejection/restrictions, dissatisfaction, and parental distress of the intervention group decreased and efficacy as parents improved after taking part in the program, and these effects were sustained at follow-up. Our findings support the effectiveness of the RPRC parenting education program in changing parenting strategies and satisfaction and emphasize the need for preventive interventions for parents with young children.

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## 1. Introduction

Positive parent-child relationships during early childhood are essential for positive development throughout life. Conversely, children who have negative relationships with their parents often develop diverse problems including low academic achievement, negative social relationships, and delinquency (Breitenstein et al., 2012; Hong, Espelage, Grogan-Kaylor, & Allen-Meares, 2012; Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990). Other research has shown a significant association between negative parent-child relationships and the incidence of problematic behaviors during early childhood and adolescence, and has proven that parents play important roles in both preventing and treating their young children's behavioral problems (Breitenstein et al., 2012; Doh, Kim, Shin, Park, & Choi, 2013; Moffit, 1993; Posthumus, Raaijmakers, Maassen, van Engeland, & Matthys, 2012; Tremblay, 2000). This suggests that early intervention programs for the parents of young children could be pivotal in encouraging positive academic, social, and emotional development.

In recognition of their importance, diverse interventions (e.g., parenting education, training, and counselling programs) for the parents

of young children have been developed to improve parenting behaviors. Among the interventions, parenting education programs have been implemented with the aim of enhancing parents' ability to care for and discipline their children (e.g., Dishion et al., 2008; Kim, Doh, Hong, & Choi, 2011; Posthumus et al., 2012). These programs have shown significant positive outcomes, including improvements in parenting behaviors, co-parenting, and parenting efficacy, as well as decreases in parenting stress (Breitenstein et al., 2012; Doh et al., 2013; Jang & Yoo, 2008; Park, 2000). Such improvements in parenting strategies and in parents' own psychological status are important for both parents' and children's well-being.

Although many parenting education programs have focused on providing concrete knowledge and skills (Kinsworthy & Garza, 2010; Yoo & Hong, 1998), the need to consider parents' psychological capacity and their ability to apply newfound knowledge to real-life settings has recently been recognized. According to a meta-analysis on thirty-nine studies regarding parenting programs for parents of preschoolers, which were implemented in the years between 2000 and 2012 in South Korea (Chung, Yoo, Cha, & Park, 2013), thirty programs solely addressed parenting behavior. Four studies dealt with parents' psychological health, and five studies targeted both parenting behaviors and parents' psychological health. Considering the importance of parents' psychological health, our research aimed to develop and evaluate a 16-session program that included eight sessions of a basic parenting

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education program, *The Respected Parents & Respected Children* (RPRC), four sessions on emotional regulation, and four sessions on parent-child interactions (Doh, 2012). Parenting education programs with 12 or more sessions have been shown to be effective (Brotman et al., 2008; DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2005; Gill, Hyde, Shaw, Dishion, & Wilson, 2009; Pepler et al., 2010). A higher effectiveness of programs with 16 sessions or more, compared to programs with fewer sessions, was also reported (Chung et al., 2013).

The parenting education program evaluated in this study can be thought of as a three-step program. The Respected Parents & Respected Children (RPRC) is the first step of the 16-week program. The RPRC was first developed by Doh in 1994, and has been used as an evidence-based parenting education program in South Korea for about 20 years; several studies have demonstrated its effectiveness (Doh, 2008; Doh & Yoo, 1996; Doh et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2011). The RPRC is based on Adler and Dreikurs' equity theory (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964), which highlights the importance of democratic parent-child relationships while also taking into account traditional views on filial piety ("hyo" in South Korea; Kim, 2006). Filial piety is a well-known traditional East Asian value based on Confucianism, which emphasizes children's respect and obedience toward their parents (Sung, 1995; Yi, 1993). Based on participants' understanding of filial piety, the RPRC emphasized the principles of Adler and Dreikurs' equity theory, which hypothesizes that parents' encouragement and respects toward children will have positive effect for their development. Therefore, we aimed to educate parents concerning the value of mutual respect. That is, as parents regard their children as human beings worthy of respect, children naturally develop respect for their parents. The program helps parents develop theory-based parenting beliefs and knowledge of child development and proper parenting skills. Education on both normative child developmental stages and developmentally appropriate parenting is emphasized in the program. Changes in parents' attitude and improvements in parenting skills can be accelerated when parents understand the principles of child development and strive for positive parent-child relationships.

The four sessions on parents' emotional regulation are the second step of the current program. The emotional regulation sessions are based on extant parent training programs which use cognitive behavioral principles (Choi, Yang, & Kim, 2004; Joyce, 1995; Sheeber & Johnson, 1994). The sessions include information on methods for ameliorating depressed mood and regulating anger. Improving the psychological health of mothers is important in preventing or diminishing problematic behaviors displayed by their children (Grimshaw & McGuire, 1998; Hutchings et al., 2007). Based on previous studies considering the improvement of parental mental health through the parenting education (Barkley et al., 2000; Drugli & Larsson, 2006; Furlong et al., 2013; Gardner, Hutchings, Bywater, & Whitaker, 2010), parents' psychological status was considered to be an important contributor for proper parenting.

The last step of the program involves four sessions on parent-child interactions. They were developed based on Landreth and Bratton's (2006) *Child Parent Relationship Therapy* (CPRT). Landreth and Bratton attempted to develop parents' ability to interact with their children through education on basic child-centered principles and skills of play therapy and by encouraging parents to engage in play time with their children based on those principles (Guerney, 2000). The sequence of this stepwise program, consisting of parenting education, emotional regulation, and parent-child interactions, is based on evidence of the effectiveness of previously developed parenting education programs. Considering the difficulties of self-disclosure in a group setting, sessions regarding emotional regulation are reserved for the second part of the program, as it is much easier for parents to express their feelings freely after establishing trust in and rapport with both a group leader and other parents in the first part of the program.

In summary, we aimed to bring about positive changes in parenting behaviors and attitudes through a 16-week parenting education program composed of three different steps. The program was expected to

have both short-term and long-term effects on parents and their children's development by educating parents on the concrete skills for emotional regulation and parent-child interactions, as well as basic parenting knowledge and skills.

Much previous research on intervention programs has used pre-tests at the beginning of the programs and post-tests at the end in order to compare research variables before and after intervention (Park, 2000; Shanley & Niec, 2011). In addition to pre-test and post-test, a follow-up test after the end of the program enables us to assess whether the program has sustained effects on participants (Bywater et al., 2009). Several studies on parenting education programs have examined sustained effects using follow-up tests (e.g., Brotman et al., 2008; DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2005; Hurlburt, Nguyen, Reid, Webster-Stratton, & Zhang, 2013; Pepler et al., 2010); these showed stabilized program effects on parenting behaviors after the programs ended. For example, in a study which evaluated the Incredible Years Series (IYS) program designed for at-risk children and their families, Brotman et al. (2008) conducted four follow-up tests over a period of 24 months after the conclusion of the program, and showed that the program had lasting effects. DeGarmo and Forgatch (2005) also found sustained effects on divorced mothers and their children in follow-up tests. For comprehensive parenting education programs aimed at demonstrating both short-term and long-term effects on parents through the three different steps, the sustained effect of whole program needed to be rigorously tested.

Many previous studies have focused on diverse changes in parents' behavioral and psychological characteristics, including parenting behaviors, parent-child relationships, levels of co-parenting, parenting efficacy, and parenting stress (Breitenstein et al., 2012; Dishion et al., 2008; Doh et al., 2013; Gardner et al., 2010; Kinsworthy & Garza, 2010; Shanley & Niec, 2011). The most significant changes were found on parenting behaviors and parent-child relationships (e.g., Dishion et al., 2008; Doh et al., 2013; Gardner et al., 2010). For example, in a program designed for the prevention of behavioral problems exhibited by 4-year-olds, mothers' parenting behaviors were significantly improved by the program, which targeted parenting skills and ways to decrease the emotional burden related to parenting (Posthumus et al., 2012). Brotman et al. (2008) also found that both an increase in positive parenting behaviors and a decrease in negative behaviors were achieved in their IYS-based parenting education program designed for mothers of antisocial children.

Co-parenting refers to the extent to which parents cooperate with spouses in their parenting roles (Gable, Belsky, & Crnic, 1992). Parents who consistently have conversations about appropriate methods of child rearing and agree on how to raise their children can have a positive influence on their children by engendering feelings of safety, which is an important building block for psychological and behavioral development (Doh, 2012). The level of congruence in parenting is especially related to problematic behaviors exhibited by preschoolers. Children of parents who agreed with each other less often and had more conflicts regarding parenting were more likely to exhibit externalizing behavioral problems such as hyperactivity and aggression (Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001). In addition, children of divorced parents tended to show better behavioral adjustment when their parents had cooperative relationships with their ex-spouses in terms of childrearing (Belsky, Crnic, & Gable, 1995). However, in spite of its importance, co-parenting has not been emphasized in previous research. A study by Kim et al. (2015) is one of the few that found a significant decrease in conflicted co-parenting among parents who participated in the basic 8-week RPRC program. Although education for couples could be more effective than individual education for mothers/fathers, Kim and colleagues' study showed that the mothers who participated in the RPRC program attempted to coordinate their parenting beliefs with their husbands'.

Parenting efficacy is an important cognitive element that can help parents adjust to their roles and settle child-rearing problems (Choi, 2005; Teti & Gelfand, 1991). Specifically, mothers with higher levels of

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