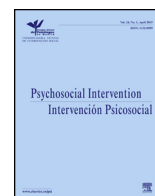




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Editorial Comment

## Quality of implementation in evidence-based positive parenting programs in Spain: Introduction to the special issue



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### ABSTRACT

The main contribution of this special issue is to present evaluation studies involving large-scale experiences of implementation of positive parenting programs delivered through home, group-based, and on-line formats in Spain. Two research questions were addressed: (1) what factors affect implementation; and (2) for whom and under which implementation conditions the programs lead to positive outcomes. Target populations were mainly families from low and middle socioeconomic backgrounds, and parents at psychosocial risk attending family support services in need of improving their parenting skills. All the programs fall under the umbrella of the positive parenting initiative launched by the Council of Europe, are evidence-based, follow a collaborative schema with national, regional, or local authorities, have multi-site implementation, and are supported by highly experienced researchers from Spanish universities. Special attention is given to the program adaptations to different contexts, the profile of parents who benefited most from the programs, analyses of the implementation process, and the assessment of parenting programs in the community. The information provided will help to increase our knowledge of evidence-based parenting programs in Spain, their implementation processes and results, and the future challenges that need to be addressed to continue the current expansion of evidence-based parenting programs.

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## Calidad de la implementación de los programas de parentalidad basados en evidencias positivas en España: introducción al número especial

### RESUMEN

La contribución principal de este número especial es presentar estudios de evaluación de programas de parentalidad positiva en España que implican experiencias de implementación a gran escala mediante formatos domiciliarios, grupales y *online*. Se abordan 2 preguntas de investigación: 1) qué factores afectan a la implementación, y 2) para quién y bajo qué condiciones de implementación los programas alcanzan sus mejores resultados. Las poblaciones beneficiarias son principalmente familias de contextos socioeconómicos bajos y medios, con padres y madres en riesgo psicosocial que asisten a los servicios de apoyo a las familias porque necesitan mejorar sus habilidades parentales. Todos los programas comparten la iniciativa del Consejo de Europa sobre parentalidad positiva, están basados en evidencia, siguen un esquema de colaboración con instituciones nacionales, autonómicas o locales, presentan una implementación en varios lugares y reciben el apoyo de expertos de varias universidades españolas. Los estudios examinan la adaptación de los programas en diferentes contextos, el perfil de padres y madres que más se benefician de los programas, el análisis del impacto del proceso de implementación de los programas y llevan a cabo la evaluación de programas de parentalidad positiva en una comunidad. La información proporcionada puede ser de gran ayuda para mejorar nuestro conocimiento sobre los programas basados

#### Palabras clave:

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en evidencia en España, su proceso de implementación y sus resultados, así como para identificar los retos futuros que habrán de abordarse para continuar la actual expansión de programas de parentalidad positiva basados en evidencia.

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In Europe there is an increasing use of parenting programs aimed at strengthening and empowering families and communities in the context of family support services. Most of these initiatives are framed in the Council of Europe Recommendation (Rec2006/19) on Policy to Support Positive Parenting (Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 2006). The notion of positive parenting is defined as: “parental behavior based on the best interest of the child that is nurturing, empowering, non-violent and provides recognition and guidance which involves setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child” (p. 6). The Recommendation places a prevention-based focus on the development of positive parent–child relationships, seeing this as the best way to protect children, preserve their rights, and promote their development (Daly, 2007; Rodrigo, 2010). The recommendation also emphasizes the responsibility of the state to create the best conditions for this by providing parents with sufficient and adequate support. Parenting support includes any intervention for parents or caregivers (i.e., a parenting program) aimed at reducing risks and promoting protective factors for their children, in relation to their social, physical and emotional wellbeing (Moran, Ghate, & van der Merve, 2004). The support is targeted at those who provide significant care for children in a home or family context, and may include biological parents, step-parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, grandparents, or other relatives. According to the recommendation, services should support parents from a variety of family situations, but especially parents and children facing adverse circumstances (e.g., couple violence, low educational background, poverty, lack of social support, or substance abuse). Finally, diversity should be recognized and respected in relation to family patterns and cultural and gender differences, while keeping in mind the best interest of the child.

Since 2009, Spain has also adopted a prevention approach to family support, inspired by the Council of Europe’s positive parenting framework. To promote this initiative, a partnership was created that brings together the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services, and Equality, the State Federation of Towns and Provinces (FEMP in Spanish), and a consortium of six Spanish Universities (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Universidad de Barcelona, Universidad de La Laguna, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Universidad del País Vasco and Universidad de Oviedo). The first objective of this collaborative venture was to disseminate the positive parenting framework among professionals working in child and family services as well as throughout the network of social, educational, health, and community services (Rodrigo, Máiquez, & Martín, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). Under this partnership schema the platform [www.familiasenpositivo.es/](http://www.familiasenpositivo.es/) was also created to contribute to the online dissemination of the positive parenting initiative to the public in general (extranet), and to provide the professionals with a space for learning about instruments, programs and research results and for exchanging good practices (intranet).

The second objective of the collaborative venture was to enhance innovative and quality assurance processes in family support services by means of changes to existing organizational cultures and professional practices. To this end, a *Guide of Best Practices in Positive Parenting* (*Guía de Buenas prácticas en Parentalidad positiva*) was elaborated. This Guide is the fruit of the collaborative

work undertaken by the panel of experts from the aforementioned consortium of universities as well as the contributions of professionals and representatives of public and private agencies in Spain, who provided feedback from the field throughout the drafting process. The Guide is a resource directed at the professionals, service users, and policy-makers involved in the process of improving the services offered to families. The best practices outlined in the Guide are organized around three topics: (a) characteristics of family support services and organizational culture; (b) the intervention process with the family (reception, assessment, intervention, and supervision); and (c) the use of evidence-based preventive psycho-educational and community programs targeted at the child and the family. The application of the Guide is facilitated by means of an online protocol hosted on the aforementioned platform: [www.familiasenpositivo.es/](http://www.familiasenpositivo.es/). The protocol includes 25 best practices and a number of corresponding indicators, which can be used to evaluate the extent to which these practices are present in the preventive work with families in a given service. After all indicators are evaluated a final report is produced with a list of what has already been achieved as well as recommendations for improvement, which may serve as a road map to guide the innovation process.

All of the above initiatives to promote the positive parenting framework are necessary, since taking a preventive stance to family intervention involves a profound shift in the way professionals understand their work with families, moving from a deficit approach to one based on prevention and promotion (Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003; Rodrigo, Byrne, & Álvarez, 2012). According to this latter view, the focus should be on the promotion of parental capacities and move toward a strengthening approach that identifies parents’ existing skills and strengths and builds on these. Professionals should avoid creating excessive dependency on the services, among families, and increase their self-confidence by means of a collaborative alliance. Interventions should also be based on promoting the strengths and resources of the children to help them to communicate their feelings and needs. And finally, the innovative and quality assurance processes should be enhanced by identifying professional best practices and improving the organizational cultures in the services.

Of all the prevention work inspired by the positive parenting framework that has been undertaken in Spain, the flagship initiative involves the implementation and evaluation of evidence-based positive parenting programs. This special issue is dedicated to disseminating examples of this work providing a description of the implementation and evaluation of the parenting programs, along with an illustration of some of the program results. A previous special issue in this journal provided international evidence of psychosocial intervention programs for children and families, underscoring the relevance of introducing preventive early intervention programs (de Paul, 2012). The content of the current issue endorses the same preventive focus and builds on it by including parenting programs implemented in Spain and directed at parents of young and older children and adolescents. A particular emphasis is placed on the way the programs are implemented in the family services—a neglected topic even in international contexts—by identifying the factors affecting the implementation process and assessing their impact on the program outcomes. To this end, this

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