



Assessment of positive parenting programmes in the Autonomous Region of the Basque Country (Spain)



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 February 2016

Accepted 4 March 2016

Available online 25 April 2016

Keywords:

Programme assessment

Positive parenting

Indicators

Evidence-based

Family

Child development

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a study aimed at identifying and assessing positive parenting programmes and activities carried out in the Autonomous Region of the Basque Country (ARBC), Spain. The study is a development of the III Inter-institutional Family Support Plan (2011), drafted by the Basque Government's Department of Family Policy and Community Development, and its aim is to offer a series of sound criteria for improving existing programmes and ensuring the correct design and implementation of new ones in the future. It analyses 129 programmes and gathers data relative to institutional management and coordination, format, quality of the established aims, adaptation to the theoretical proposal for an Optimal Positive Parenting Curriculum, scientific base, use of the framework of reference for competences, working method, assessment techniques, budgets and publicity, among others. The results highlight the good quality of the programmes' aims and content, and the poor systematic assessment of these same aspects. The study concludes with a series of recommendations for improving the initiatives, integrated into a proposal for a system of indicators to assess and implement positive parenting programmes.

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Evaluación de programas de parentalidad positiva en la comunidad autónoma del País Vasco (España)

RESUMEN

En este trabajo se presentan los datos de un estudio de identificación y valoración de programas y actividades de parentalidad positiva llevados a cabo en el ámbito de la comunidad autónoma del País Vasco (CAPV). El estudio constituye un desarrollo del III Plan Interinstitucional de Apoyo a la Familia (2011), elaborado por la Dirección de Política Familiar y Desarrollo Comunitario del Gobierno Vasco, y su objetivo es ofrecer criterios sólidos para mejorar los programas existentes y para lograr un correcto diseño e implementación de nuevos programas en el futuro. En el estudio se analizan 129 programas y se obtienen datos relativos a la gestión y coordinación institucional, formato, calidad de los objetivos, ajuste a la propuesta teórica del currículo óptimo de parentalidad positiva, fundamentos científicos, utilización del marco de referencia de las competencias, metodología de trabajo, prácticas de evaluación, presupuestos, publicidad, etc. Entre los resultados destacan la buena calidad de los objetivos y contenidos de los programas y la baja práctica de evaluación sistemática de los mismos. El trabajo concluye con una serie de recomendaciones para mejorar los programas, integradas en la propuesta de un sistema de indicadores para la evaluación e implementación de programas de parentalidad positiva.

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Palabras clave:

Evaluación de programas

Parentalidad positiva

Indicadores

Basado en la evidencia

Familia

Desarrollo infantil

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This paper presents the results of a study commissioned by the Basque Government's Department of Family Policy and Community Development from the *Haezi-Etxadi* working group at the University of the Basque Country. This request to carry out an inventory of positive parenting activities and programmes forms part of the implementation of the III Inter-institutional Family Support Plan (2011–2015), which was approved by the Basque Government (Basque Government, 2011a) and is supported by diverse documents outlining the situation of families in the Autonomous Region of the Basque Country (ARBC) in Spain, including the Diagnosis for the III Inter-institutional Family Support Plan (2011b). The Plan also encompasses data from other documents, including the System of Indicators for Monitoring the Situation of Children and Adolescents in the ARBC (Basque Government, 2010a), the publication entitled Approach to the Needs and Demands of Children and Adolescents in the ARBC (Basque Government, 2010b) and, finally, the Diagnosis of Childhood and Adolescence in the ARBC (Basque Government, 2011c).

In light of the data presented in the aforementioned documents, a series of different measures and references regarding positive parenting were included in the III Inter-institutional Family Support Plan (Basque Government, 2011a). Measure 101 of the Plan proposes the establishment of new evidence-based positive parenting proposals for developing parenting skills and competences, following the identification and assessment of initiatives already up and running in the ARBC. Measure 101 is complemented by the proposal to establish a positive parenting resource bank in collaboration with scientific researchers, to be placed at the disposal of all professionals working in this field. This present study presents the results of the prior assessment of the positive parenting programmes and activities currently existing in the ARBC, as part of the effort to implement measure 101 of the III Inter-institutional Plan.

The establishment of positive parenting policies is justified, firstly, by empirical evidence showing the significant influence of family context on psychological development. Part of this evidence was obtained in studies conducted in the ARBC (Arranz, Oliva, Sánchez, Olabarrieta, & Richards, 2010; Oliva, Arranz, Parra, & Olabarrieta, 2014). Secondly, said policies are informed by data which link certain family variables with the development of adaptation problems and pathologies throughout the course of an individual's entire life cycle (Van Loon, Van de Ven, Van Doesum, Witteman, & Hosman 2014), as well as by evidence regarding the characteristics and problems of families with dependent children in the ARBC. However, the most general justification lies in the efficacy and cost-effectiveness demonstrated by many parenting skill development programmes (Asmussen, 2011; Morrison, Pikhart, Ruiz, & Goldblatt, 2014).

The scientific basis upon which the development of positive parenting policies rests is made up of the body of research showing the decisive influence that a high-quality family context has on people's healthy psychological development, with this influence being significant from the prenatal stage onwards (Roncallo, Sánchez de Miguél, & Arranz, 2015). In the ARBC specifically, social intervention through positive parenting practices is also indicated for a number of demographic circumstances and reasons linked to relations within Basque families. The documents cited above (Basque Government, 2010a, 2010b; Basque Government 2011a, 2011b, 2011c) underscore the high percentage of single-parent families with dependent children living in the region (40% of all single-parent families, and 3% of all Basque families in general). Given that these families are more likely to be at risk of exclusion, it is evident that they should be the target of diverse support measures, including positive parenting initiatives. It is also significant that 18.8% of families claim to be experiencing serious problems of some kind with their dependent children (–18). Data regarding

family communications are also worth noting, since, in general terms, communication appears to be difficult with fathers (38% of those interviewed in the survey conducted claimed to have problems talking to their father about the issues that concern them) and much more fluid with mothers (only 14% reported having problems talking to their mother). It is also important to mention that, in 2010, 9500 minors were treated by the mental health services operating in the three provinces of the ARBC.

Although the number of separations and divorces in families with dependent children dropped significantly between 2005 and 2009 (1000 fewer cases), in 2009 a total of 2088 couples with dependent children separated. In many cases, the separation and divorce process itself indicates that the children in question are exposed to conflict between their parents, an experience which has one of the greatest negative impacts on children's psychological adjustment. Other indicators of conflict include cases of missing minors (1260 in 2010, although most of them were found in that same year), the increase in cases of parental abuse by children (49 in 2007) and cases of child abuse in the family environment (395 in 2010).

Other data worth mentioning include those linked to the early consumption of alcohol and other substances; the mean age at which minors first start to consume alcohol in the ARBC is 13, and almost 20% of under 18s living in the region drink alcohol on a weekly basis. Moreover, 26% of the Basque population aged between 15 and 19 say they engage in at-risk or heavy drinking at weekends. In addition to this, 20% of the population aged between 15 and 19 are cannabis users, and 43.8% admit to having experimented at some time or another with the drug. Finally, the documents Basque Government (2011b, 2011c) indicate that Basque families tend to be overprotective in their parenting style.

In accordance with the legal cover provided by the III Inter-institutional Family Support Plan, as well as with available scientific data regarding the effectiveness of positive parenting programmes as preventive measures for the emergence of diverse pathologies throughout individuals' psychological development (Gardner, Montgomery, & Knerr, 2015), the decision was made to assess current positive parenting programmes and activities. The justification for this decision was a desire to use public resources more efficiently, and precedence for this can be found in the literature, particularly in the work of Layzer, Goodson, Bernstein, and Price (2001), who conducted a national survey of family support programmes using quality criteria very similar to those used here, including those linked to programme assessment and the scientific basis of the initiative, among others. Other significant precedents include the works by Lundahl, Risser, and Lovejoy (2006) and Kaminski, Valle, Filene, and Boyle (2008), both of whom carried out meta-analyses on the efficacy of parent education programmes, highlighting the importance of the formats and methodologies with which said programmes are implemented. Another interesting work in this sense is the study by Scott (2010), who reported that programmes in the United Kingdom were not implemented rigorously enough, and underscored the importance of an initiative to found a national academy of professionals working in the field of parent education programmes.

In light of the basic situation outlined above; the following aims were therefore established for this present study: (1) to identify and assess positive parenting programmes underway in the ARBC in 2012; and (2) to propose improvements for existing programmes and guidelines for the correct design of future ones, with the aim of ensuring that future parenting education programmes comply with feasibility, efficacy and efficiency criteria. Evidence-based parent education programmes should be based on systematic research and should be reviewed and assessed in accordance with the criteria of significance and representativeness, providing both short and long-term information regarding the meeting of targets. Aims should

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