



Universal violence and child maltreatment prevention programs for parents: A systematic review



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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to review recent literature on universal violence and child maltreatment prevention programs for parents. The following databases were used: Web of Science, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PubMed, LILACS, and SciELO. The keywords included the following: (Parenting Program or Parent Training or Parent Intervention) and (Maltreatment or Violence or Violence Prevention). For inclusion in this review, the programs had to be structured, working in groups of parents aiming to improve parenting practices. Twenty-three studies were included, and 16 different types of parenting programs were identified. Ninety-one percent of the studies were conducted in developed countries. All the programs focused on the prevention of violence and maltreatment by promoting positive parenting practices. Only seven studies were randomized controlled trials. All studies that evaluated parenting strategies ($n = 18$), reported after the interventions. The programs also effectively improved child behavior in 90% of the studies that assessed this outcome. In conclusion, parenting educational programs appear to be an important strategy for the universal prevention of violence and maltreatment against children. Future studies should assess the applicability and effectiveness of parenting programs for the prevention of violence against children in developing countries. Further randomized control trials are also required.

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Programas de Educación Parental de Prevención Universal de la Violencia y el Maltrato: Una Revisión Sistemática

RESUMEN

El presente artículo pretende revisar la literatura actualizada acerca de los programas universales de educación parental de prevención de la violencia y el maltrato contra los niños. Las bases de datos utilizadas fueron Web of Science, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PubMed, LILACS y SciELO, con las palabras clave: *parenting program or parent training or parent intervention and maltreatment or violence or violence prevention*. Los programas eran estructurados, trabajando en grupos de padres para mejorar las prácticas educativas. Se incluyeron 23 estudios. La mayoría se llevó a cabo en los países desarrollados (91%). Se identificaron 16 diferentes programas de promoción de las prácticas educativas para prevenir la violencia y el maltrato infantil. Sólo siete estudios eran ensayos controlados aleatorios. Todos los estudios que evaluaron las prácticas educativas demostraron una mejoría después de la intervención ($n = 18$). Los programas demostraron una mejora en el comportamiento de los niños en el 90% de los estudios que evaluaron este resultado. En conclusión, los programas educativos para padres demostraron ser una estrategia importante para la prevención universal de la violencia y el maltrato infantil. Se enfatiza la importancia de la implementación y evaluación de programas de educación parental en los países en desarrollo y más ensayos controlados aleatorios.

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Violence threatens adaptive child development and can lead to mental and physical health problems, representing a high cost to society (Christian & Schwarz, 2011). Child maltreatment refers to the physical and emotional mistreatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and negligent treatment of children and their commercial or other exploitation (Butchart, Harvey, Mian, & Furniss, 2006). Violence against children is a substantial problem in both developed countries that have high-income economies and developing countries that have low- to middle-income economies, according to the classification of the World Bank (2015).

Children are negatively affected by experiences of maltreatment, abuse, and neglect (Cicchetti & Blender, 2006). These violent experiences during childhood have significant negative consequences on children's self-regulatory development (McCoy, 2013) and later mental health disorders (Jonson-Reid, Kohl, & Drake, 2012). Early negative experiences can impact genetic predisposition, brain architecture, and health in the long-term (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012).

Violence against children by adults within the family is one of the least visible forms of child maltreatment, but it is nonetheless widely prevalent in all societies (Butchart et al., 2006). In 2011, 80.8% of children were victims of maltreatment by parents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Compared with other health problems, the economic burden of child maltreatment is substantial, indicating the relevance of prevention efforts to address the high prevalence of this problem (Fang, Brown, Florence, & Mercy, 2012). However, there are particular difficulties when designing strategies for prevention in the family context because the perpetrators of maltreatment are also the source of nurturing for children (Butchart et al., 2006).

Intervention programs for children and families should begin as early as possible to reduce or avoid the need of most costly and less effective remediation programs (Arruabarrena & De Paúl, 2012). Interventions can be classified as the following: universal (which addresses the general public or an entire population group that has not been identified on the basis of individual risk), selective (which is directed toward at-risk groups or individuals), and indicated (which targets individuals with biological markers, early symptoms, or problematic behaviors that predict a high level of risk; O'Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009). Considering the difficulty in identifying child maltreatment within families, universal prevention programs can provide a great opportunity to prevent violence and maltreatment because they could be available to community-based populations. Additionally, undertaking universal prevention efforts that address all families avoids the risk of stigmatization (Byrne, Rodrigo, & Maiquez, 2014; Heinrichs, Kliem, & Hahlweg, 2014).

The main strategies to prevent child maltreatment include parenting programs that promote safe, stable, and nurturing relationships between caregivers and children at early ages (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014; World Health Organization, 2009). These prevention strategies provide experiences and opportunities to parents so they can learn to develop effective parenting practices (Trivette & Dunst, 2009). Parenting educational programs can effectively prevent child maltreatment, abuse, and neglect by increasing parents' knowledge of child development, improving parents' child-rearing skills, and encouraging positive child management strategies (Mikton & Butchart, 2009). The goals of a large portion of these programs do not focus specifically on violent behavior; they are instead designed to encourage healthy relationships and increase parental skills (World Health Organization, 2009). Therefore, in many evaluation studies, risk factors for child maltreatment (e.g., measures of child abuse potential, parental stress, or changes in parental attitudes toward disciplinary behavior) are used to assess the programs rather than direct measures (e.g., reports of child protective services; World Health Organization, 2009).

Previous reviews on parenting programs reported significant findings that are related to the effectiveness of these programs across parental and child outcomes, such as changing parenting behavior and preventing child behavior problems (Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008; Rios & Williams, 2008), modifying disruptive child behavior (Lundahl, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2006), improving emotional and behavioral adjustment of children under three years of age (Barlow, Smailagic, Ferriter, Bennett, & Jones, 2010), and increasing parents' psychosocial wellbeing in the short-term (Barlow, Smailagic, Hubbard, Roloff, & Bennett, 2012). However, these programs cited above did not specifically focus on the prevention of violence and maltreatment.

Some reviews have focused specifically on violence and maltreatment prevention interventions, including parenting programs and other types of interventions (Holzer, Higgins, Bromfield, & Higgins, 2006; MacMillan et al., 2009). Nonetheless, these reviews did not follow a formal systematic review process that utilizes an explicit and auditable protocol, including the mechanisms that were used to search, select, and retrieve reports (Sandelowski, 2008). Most recently, MacMillan et al. (2009) included articles up to only 2008; therefore, an updated systematic review on the relevant literature is needed. Notably, there is one relatively recent systematic review on the effectiveness of universal and selective child maltreatment prevention programs, but it was a review of review studies that were published up to July 2008, and it also did not focus exclusively on parental education programs (Mikton & Butchart, 2009). Two other reviews focused on parenting programs but specifically focused on low- and middle-income economies (Knerr, Gardner, & Cluver, 2013; Mejia, Calam, & Sanders, 2012).

Therefore, there are still gaps in the literature with regard to recent systematic reviews that focus on parenting intervention programs that are related to the universal prevention of violence and maltreatment. The present systematic review seeks to add to previous reviews on child maltreatment prevention, with a specific focus on universal prevention interventions through parenting educational programs in both developed and developing countries. The overall aim of this study was to critically examine recent empirical studies on universal violence and child maltreatment prevention programs for parents that were published between 2008 and 2014. The questions that guided this review were the following: (i) What is the geographical distribution of the studies? (ii) Which parenting educational programs have been conducted for the universal prevention of violence and maltreatment with parents or other caregivers of children? (iii) What are the experimental designs and methodologies used to assess the efficacy/effectiveness of these programs? (iv) What are the main findings after implementation of these parenting educational programs?

Methods

A systematic review of universal violence and child maltreatment prevention programs for parents was conducted based on principles of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA; Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). The review was conducted by searching the following databases: Web of Science, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PubMed, LILACS, and SciELO. The keywords that were used in the searches included the following: (Parenting Program or Parent Training or Parent Intervention) and (Maltreatment or Violence or Violence Prevention).

The filters that were used to refine the search results were the following: Web of Science (document type=article, timespan=2008–2014), PsycINFO and PsycARTICLES (document type=journal article, year=2008–2014), PubMed (publication date=2008–2014, species=humans, article type=clinical trial). All

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