Preventing violence:
Evaluating outcomes of parenting programmes

VIOLENCE PREVENTION ALLIANCE

GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION
CAMPAGNE MONDIALE POUR LA PREVENTION DE LA VIOLENCE
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World Health Organization

University of Cape Town · iYunivesithi yaseKapa · Universiteit van Kaapstad

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This document is a product of the Parenting Project Group, a project group of the World Health Organization's Violence Prevention Alliance. The text was written by Inge Wessels, with critical commentary provided by Christopher Mikton, Catherine L. Ward, Theresa Kilbane, the other members of the Parenting Project Group (Bernadette Madrid, Giovanna Campello, Howard Dubowitz, Judy Hutchings, Margaret Lynch and Renato Alves), Lisa Jones and additional reviewers who are involved with parenting programmes to prevent violence. This project and publication was kindly funded by the UBS Optimus Foundation.

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The context of this guidance

Violence is both a serious human rights violation and a major public health concern. It affects the general well-being, physical and mental health, and social functioning of millions of people (*1*); it also puts strain on health systems, lowers economic productivity, and has a negative effect on economic and social development (*2*). In particular, the number of children affected by violence each year is a major concern (*3*).

Child maltreatment affects children's physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. It can lead to the body's stress response system being overactive, which can harm the development of the brain and other organs, and increase the risk for stress-related illness and impaired cognition (the capacity to think, learn and understand) (*4*). Maltreatment is a risk factor for mental health, education, employment and relationship problems later in life. It also increases the likelihood of behaviour that is a risk to health, such as smoking, drinking heavily, drug use, over-eating and unsafe sex (*5*). These behaviours are, in turn, major causes of death, disease and disability, including heart disease, cancer, diabetes and suicide – sometimes decades later (*5*). Victims of maltreatment are also more likely to become perpetrators and victims of other types of violence later in life (*6*).

Child maltreatment negatively affects a country's economy, due to expenses relating to treating victims' health problems, welfare costs, lowered economic productivity and so forth (*7*). In the United States of America (USA), in 2010, the lifetime cost for each victim of non-fatal child maltreatment was estimated to be US$ 210 012 (*7*). The many serious economic, physical and mental health consequences of child maltreatment mean that it makes sense to develop and implement effective prevention strategies.

Child maltreatment is more likely in families that have difficulties developing stable, warm and positive relationships (*8*). Children are at increased risk of being maltreated if a parent or guardian has a poor understanding of child development, and therefore has unrealistic expectations about the child's behaviour (*8*). This is also the case if parents and guardians do not show the child much care or affection, are less responsive to the child, have a harsh or inconsistent parenting style, and believe that corporal punishment (for example, smacking) is an acceptable form of discipline (*1, 5*). Strengthening parenting[1] therefore plays an important role in preventing child maltreatment.

One way of strengthening parenting is through parenting programmes. Although many parenting programmes do not specifically aim to reduce or prevent violence, those which aim to strengthen positive relationships through play and praise, and provide effective, age-appropriate positive discipline, have the potential to do so (*9*).

Parenting programmes to prevent violence usually take the shape of either individual or group-based parenting support. An example of individual parenting support is home visits, which involve trained home visitors visiting parents (typically only the mother) in their homes both during and after their pregnancy. The home visitor supports and educates parents so as to strengthen parenting skills, improve child health and prevent child maltreatment (*10*). Group-based parenting support, on the other hand, is typically provided by trained staff to groups of parents together. These programmes aim to prevent child maltreatment by improving parenting skills, increasing parents' understanding

[1] Throughout this document, parenting does not only refer to parenting by biological parents, but by all primary caregivers.

of child development and encouraging the use of positive discipline strategies (*10*).

Most parenting programmes that have proven to be effective at preventing violence have been developed and tested in high-income countries such as the USA and the United Kingdom. There is very little work on parenting programmes in low- and middle-income countries. However, there is evidence from low-resource settings that positive parent-child relationships and a positive parenting style can buffer the effects of family and community influences on children's development, including violent behaviour later in life (*11, 12*). From what is already known, there is good evidence to support promoting parenting programmes across different cultural and economic backgrounds.

Because we do not know enough about parenting programmes in low- and middle-income countries, evaluations of programmes are critical. First, we need to confirm that desired results are achieved in new contexts. Second, because of the lack of resources available to fund programmes in poorer countries, evaluations can prevent time and money from being wasted on programmes that do not work. Third, the results from outcome evaluations can be used to influence governments to fund parenting programmes.

This document was designed to help strengthen the evidence for parenting programmes aimed at preventing violence in low- and middle-income countries. The intended audiences are:

- policy-makers;
- programme developers, planners and commissioners;
- high-level practitioners in government ministries, such as health and social development;
- nongovernmental organisations;
- community-based organisations; and
- donors working in the area of violence prevention.

After going through this document, you should:

- understand the need for solid evidence of a programme's effectiveness;
- know about the current literature on parenting programmes aimed at preventing violence; and
- understand the process of carrying out outcome evaluations of parenting programmes aimed at preventing violence.

This document has a related appendix on the World Health Organization's web site at www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/violence/parenting_evaluations/. The appendix contains a variety of evaluation resources, including links to useful publications and web sites, and names of evaluators who are experts in parenting programmes.

SECTION 1

What is 'outcome evaluation' and why do we need it?

What is 'programme evaluation'?

Put simply, programme evaluation is a process which involves collecting, analysing, interpreting and sharing information about the workings and effectiveness of programmes (*13*). Different types of evaluation are appropriate at different stages of a programme – from the design stage, through to long-term follow-up of participants after the programme has ended (*13*). The earlier a programme is evaluated, the stronger the programme is likely to be.

Needs assessment

A programme is created so that it can tackle a particular problem. Understanding the nature of the problem and how common and widespread it is can help to make sure that the programme being developed meets the intended purpose, and whether there actually needs to be a programme. A needs assessment should be carried out when the programme is first thought of or when an existing programme is restructured, as it can identify what services are needed and how they should be provided.

Below is an example of how a needs assessment might be used. The programme in the example – Caring Families – is fictional and will be used as an example throughout this document.

Developing and assessing the programme theory

Once the need for a programme has been established, the next step is to develop a programme theory and assess it. All programme staff should work together to create the programme theory before the programme is developed. A programme theory is a blueprint that represents how the programme is supposed to work and acts as a guide to how the programme should be designed and delivered so that it achieves its desired effects. Creating a diagram can help produce the programme theory as it makes it easier to see the mechanisms through which the programme hopes to achieve its aims (see Annex on *Creating a diagram of programme theory*). By carrying out an assessment of this theory (that is, by checking whether current scientific evidence suggests that the individual elements of the programme, as suggested in the theory, are likely to make the programme a success),

EXAMPLE

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