

The Implementation of Parent-Child Programs to Improve Outcomes in Families Who Experience Substance Use

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Abstract

Introduction: Research has demonstrated that parents struggling with addiction spend only half as much time with their children, are more likely to use forms of abusive child discipline, neglect their children, and have little or impractical expectations of their child's development. The Strengthening Families Program (SFP) is a 14-week program implemented worldwide for families affected by addiction. SFP incorporates interactive sessions for parents to adopt effective parenting strategies while their children learn complementary skills. In the past, this program has targeted families with older children; the current study is a descriptive analysis of one of the first SFP sessions for families with children aged 0-3.

Key Objectives: The purpose of the current study is to evaluate the impact of SFP with families who have children >3 years of age. This sample is the first cohort of SFP for this age group; thus, the aim is to examine demographic descriptors and approximate areas of change after completion. Ultimately, we aim to continue implementing SFP and add to the dataset to allow for pre- and post- mean-comparisons.

Methods: Before SFP, parents completed the Ages and Stages-Social and Emotional (ASQ-SE) questionnaire measuring their child's social and emotional developmental stages. At program completion, parents completed a series of retrospective pre-post questionnaires on substance use, daily life, and perceived family strengths. Mean scores were calculated for all scales, and additional descriptive statistics noted to understand families' experiences both before and after SFP.

Results: In total, 8 parents (aged 20-36) and 7 babies (aged 5-18 months) completed SFP. Single mothers comprised 50% of the sample. ASQ-SE scores indicated that 62.5% of babies were at risk for poor social and emotional development. Inferential statistics were not conducted; however, mean trends suggest that families experienced differences in feelings of love, support, and care (MT1=3.45; MT2=4.42), community building (MT1=2.85; MT2=4.00), and positive communication styles (MT1= 2.71; MT2=4.14). Additionally, almost all parents decreased monthly substance-use, which they attributed to lessons regarding the risk of use around children.

Conclusion: Through targeted initiatives for families experiencing addiction, we may help prevent adverse childhood experiences. ASQ-SE follow-ups are planned.