



Incredible Years Parent Training Program in ADHD: Parents attendance and satisfaction

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INTRODUCTION

Although parent training programs have proven effective in the reduction of ADHD symptoms in preschoolers (1,2,3), a major concern is how to engage and retain parents in such programs which, in turn, are conditions of their effectiveness (4).

GOALS

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the experience with the use of the Webster-Stratton's Incredible Years Basic Parent Training Program (5) in Portugal, particularly regarding the attendance rates and levels of satisfaction reported by parents about the different components of the program. Parents of preschoolers with symptoms of ADHD are compared with parents of normal controls.

METHODS

SUBJECTS

112 parents of preschoolers (aged 3 to 6 years), who participated in the Incredible Years Program (IY).

Non-clinical groups: Some of the IY groups comprised parents of children who don't have ADHD characteristics (NCG, n=46 parents); all these parents are volunteers recruited in preschool settings.

Clinical groups: Attended by parents whose children were above the borderline or clinical cut-off point of the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (total of difficulties used as screening), and ADHD markers of the *Werry-Weiss-Peters Activity Scale* or the *Parental Account of Child's Symptoms - ADHD Scale* (CG, n=66 parents); none of these children are under any kind of pharmacological or psychological intervention.

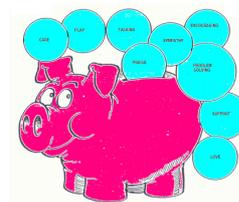
From the 112 parents, 84 are mothers (75%), and 28 are fathers (25%). The percentage of couples is significantly higher in the CGs (65%) than in the NCGs (26%) ($\chi^2(1, N = 112) = 15.03, p < .001$). In both groups more than half the parents have completed a university degree or equivalent. However, CGs have a higher percentage of parents with an educational level below high school (CGs=20% vs. NCGs=4%). As far as the children are concerned, the proportion of boys and girls is significantly different in both groups (3:1 in CGs; 1:1 in NCGs; $\chi^2(1, N = 112) = 4.69, p < .05$).

INTERVENTION

The *Incredible Years Basic Parent Training Program* was delivered in groups of 8-12 parents, through 12 or 14 weekly sessions. In general, the main goals of the program are: to strengthen parent-child relationship and encourage child cooperation; to increase parents' nurturing and positive parenting skills; to encourage effective limit setting and definition of clear household rules; and to promote the use of non-violent discipline strategies, such as ignoring and time-out. All the group leaders were either certified or under supervision for certification. Most of the groups were run in the evening (from 6 to 8 pm). Child care and snacks were provided. A weekly phone call from group leaders and make-up sessions were made and buddy calls between sessions were strongly recommended.

EVALUATION

At the end of the program parents are asked to rate their levels of satisfaction regarding the program in general and, in particular: the degree of difficulty and



usefulness of the different methods used (e.g. explanations given by group leaders, DVDs, discussion in group, role-play); degree of difficulty and usefulness of the different strategies trained (e.g. play, praise, ignore, clear commands, time-out); group leaders skills; and group support. All the ratings are done on a 7-point scale, where a higher rate means a higher level of satisfaction.

RESULTS

- The attendance rates are high for both CG and NCGs, with no significant differences observed between them. Parents attended 86% of all sessions, both in the 12 and in the 14 sessions' format.
- Both groups express high degrees of satisfaction with the program: all the average values are above 6 on a 7 point scale, except for Difficulty (Figure 1).
- All the components of the program are evaluated by parents as helpful (average rates above 6 except for buddy calls, and role-play in NCGs). The "use of practice or role plays during group sessions" is evaluated as more useful by parents of CGs (M=6.27) than of NCGs (M=5.83) ($t(61.44) = 2.15, p < .05$) (Figure 2).
- All the strategies trained in the program are evaluated as very helpful (average rates above 6). However, parents of NCGs tend to evaluate "Ignoring" as a more helpful strategy than parents of CGs ($t(104) = -1.96, p = .053$), whereas the opposite is true for "Time-Out" ($t(101) = 3.15, p < .01$) (Figure 3).

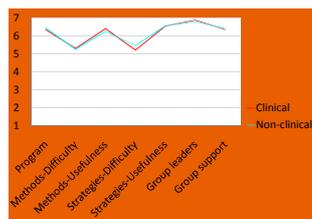


Figure 1: Overall level of satisfaction

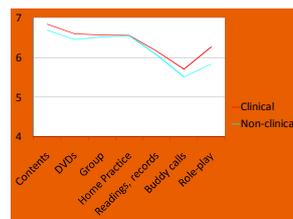


Figure 2: Usefulness of different program's methods

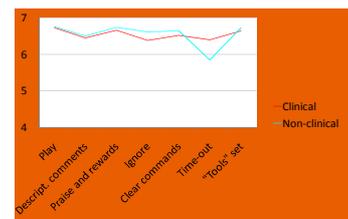


Figure 3: Usefulness of different parenting strategies

DISCUSSION

The high attendance rates and levels of satisfaction observed in both groups can probably be attributed to the accepting and non-judgmental environment of the IY groups, where parents can share their problems and learn how to use effective strategies in a clear and easily understandable way (4). The facilitating conditions offered (e.g. babysitting provided to children, snacks in the middle of sessions) may also contribute to the high attendance rates observed. The role of parents as active partners in the learning process is emphasized when training strategies during the sessions through role-play. This possibility is more valued by parents of CGs, which may view these situations as good opportunities for trying new skills in a supportive environment, before they use them at home, with their more challenging children. The fact that time-out is considered a more useful strategy by parents of CGs whereas ignoring is viewed as more helpful by parents of NCGs calls the attention to the main philosophy of the program: more intrusive strategies should be used in moderation and only when more severe problems arise. On the contrary, a strong and positive parent-child relationship is the foundation of effective discipline (5).

Conclusion: Taking into account parents' attendance rates and satisfaction levels, the Incredible Years Program is a good choice to use with families of Portuguese preschoolers with symptoms of ADHD.

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