Can Technology and the Media Help Reduce Dysfunctional Parenting and Increase Engagement with Preventative Parenting Interventions?

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1.1 Aim
The studies aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Triple P-based “Driving Mum and Dad Mad” television series in improving positive parenting behaviours and child wellbeing over a six month period. A secondary aim was to compare the effectiveness of the intervention with (enhanced condition) and without (standard condition) extra support and resources. The influence of demographic details and parenting background were recorded to check for effects on outcomes and compliance.

2.1 Hypotheses
Participants were recruited across two waves, GPE1 (N = 450) and GPE2 (N = 270). Data from these two waves were combined. Both assessment groups used a repeated measures design and were randomly allocated to the two intervention conditions (standard or enhanced). Participants in the enhanced condition received downloadable tip sheets, a workbook and media resources in addition to the standard reminders to watch the series. All parents were administered a set of questionnaires measuring family background (Family Background Questionnaire); parental anger (Parental Anger Inventory); parenting style (Parenting Scale); parenting confidence for dealing with misbehaviour (Parenting Task Checklist); inter-parental conflict (Parent Problem Checklist); child disruptive behaviour (Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory); parental relationship satisfaction (Relationship Quality Index); and mood (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale). These were administered pre-intervention, as well as 12 weeks and 6 months after watching the series. Parents were also assessed on the number of episodes they watched, child-problem severity and demographic details.

Hypotheses were as follows:

1. Parental factors, such as level of dysfunctional parenting style and anger, may influence the success of the interventions and persistence with watching the television series.
2. Demographic variables may influence intervention outcomes and viewing compliance. For example, based on prior research, parents from lower socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds were predicted to show less positive changes to parenting and child outcomes than parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds.
3. Severity of child problems may influence compliance and satisfaction outcomes. Parents of children with problems of greater severity were predicted to be less likely to complete watching the series, due to increased feelings of pressure and responsibility.

3.1 Results
Results were found to support the effectiveness of the media-based interventions over 12 week and 6-months for all measured variables apart from parental relationship quality. Information was found for the other hypotheses:

1. Parents with lower DASS and PS scores were more likely to have poorer reported child and parent outcomes.
2. Partner SES was significantly correlated with poorer reported child and parent outcomes. Additionally, parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to watch the entire series and use the strategies at six-month follow-up.
3. Parents who reported greater severity of child problems were more likely to watch the entire series.

4.1 Findings
This study supported the hypothesised effectiveness of the media-based intervention, both with and without extra media support. The strength of the results was limited by a high level of dropout (particularly from parents of lower reported functioning and self-efficacy), however results still indicate support for the formats. The low-level of response to email suggests limited use of enhancement options.

5.1 Summary and Implications
Media interventions targeted at a wider audience appears to produce reliable change in parenting and child functioning, with and without additional support. These results represent the first known measure of success for such intervention, which should be replicated. Future studies should aim to address the high level of dropout and assess the outcomes for families that do.

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