Does the Triple P-Positive Parenting Program Provide Value for Money?

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1.1 Aim
The purpose of this study is to investigate the economic case for the implementation of Triple P on a population basis to reduce the prevalence of conduct disorder in children and adolescents. Importantly, this study is not undertaken to address detailed issues of program design, but rather addresses the more fundamental issue of whether investment in Triple P is likely to be a worthwhile use of health funds.

2.1 Method
The assessment of whether Triple P represents economic value is based on a technique called ‘threshold analysis’. (A limited cost effectiveness analysis is also undertaken.) Threshold analysis is used to assist resource allocation decisions.

3.1 Population of Interest
For the costs of Triple P, the base population of interest is the number of families in Queensland who have children aged 2-12 years of age. For the effectiveness of Triple P, the base population of interest is the number of children aged 6-12 years who meet the criteria for conduct disorder. There were approximately 12,582 children aged 6-12 years with conduct disorder in Queensland in 2002.

4.1 Results
It is fair to conclude that Triple P has the potential of saving more resources than it consumes. The economic modelling rests on a number of assumptions, albeit mostly conservative ones, requiring verification. Nevertheless, even modest improvements in prevalence are sufficient to make Triple P a cost-saving intervention. The reason for this is that the costs of conduct disorder are substantial. It is important to reiterate that the cost estimates of conduct disorder used in the current study are conservative. They are not lifetime costs and do not include a number of important cost categories, which can be significant. Further, the Scott et al. study occurred in the UK and the external generalizability of the estimates to other settings is an issue. Other cost estimates such as Cohen are much larger than Scott et al. and had these estimates been used Triple P would save more resources and appear more economically attractive.

5.1 Findings
It is also important to appreciate that the current analysis only considers conduct disorder and may underestimate the true impact of Triple P. Triple P may provide additional benefits, such as reduction in maltreatment, improvements in parental quality of life, and wider societal benefits associated with less social delinquency and crime.

It is also possible that the implementation of Triple P may increase the usage of other services (through increased awareness of services and reduced stigma), or conversely, to reduce service usage (through health promotion, prevention and early intervention). To what extent this will happen is hard to predict but unlikely to be large enough to change the general conclusions of this analysis. Further evaluation is required of the implementation of Triple P to estimate the effectiveness and costs of the intervention. Likewise, empirical estimates of final outcomes rather than intermediate outcomes are required.

6.1 Summary and Implications
The analysis assumes that there is an available workforce to deliver the intervention on a population level. With respect to equity considerations, given that the prevalence of conduct disorder is greater in lower socio-economic status families, Triple P should have a positive impact. Lastly, cost-offsets modelled do not necessarily represent actual financial savings, due to the impact of fixed costs, system rigidities and ‘lumpiness’ in production. This is an issue that future research needs to investigate.

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