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*Enrolment, Participation, and
Retention in the
Triple P
Parenting Programme Triple P*

by

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Parenting programmes constitute a promising strategy for preventing problem behaviour amongst children and teenagers. In the Zurich Intervention and Prevention Project at Schools (*zipps*) we therefore implemented *Triple P* (Positive Parenting Program) during year 1 of the project. This newsletter examines the extent to which important target groups of the intervention could be motivated to enrol and complete the course.

The Zurich Intervention and Prevention Project at Schools (*zipps*) has two main goals: the first is to analyse the individual, family, and school-level factors that are relevant for various types of child problem behaviour. The second goal is to test the effectiveness of two interventions that aim at preventing externalising problem behaviour amongst children.

The programmes intervene at the school and at the family levels. The school programme *PATHS* (Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies), in German *PFAD* (see Eisner et al., 2006), has been developed by Greenberg et al. (1998) and includes 47 lessons taught by the class teacher. *PATHS* aims at promoting social and emotional skills in children. The family intervention was the parenting programme *Triple P* (Sanders, 1999). *Triple P* aims at promoting positive

parenting practices and thus to prevent various types of problem behaviour of children and to improve family life in general. As implemented in the Zurich trials, the programme includes four two and a half hour sessions on a weekly basis followed by up to four individual telephone sessions of 20 minutes duration.

Triple P was implemented, within the *zipps* study, as a universal intervention and was therefore offered to all parents in the target population. However, voluntary programmes only reach a part of the targeted population but can only be effective if a substantive proportion of participants has elevated risks on the targeted behaviours. It is therefore of great interest to understand the factors that influence programme participation.

Given the goals of *Triple P*, namely to reduce child problem behaviour and to improve family climate by enhancing parenting skills, three overlapping target groups of this study can be distinguished: The first group are parents with problematic parenting practices such as, for example, inconsistent parenting practices or lack of emotional warmth and support for the child. The second group includes parents whose children show aggressive or disruptive behaviour that is amenable to improvement. The third group consists of parents who are not already reached by existing structures and services, in particular economically disadvantaged parents with low educational resources and a migrant background.

Significance of this study

There is considerable evidence that recruitment into universal parenting skills programmes is problematically low even if substantial efforts are made to reduce possible barriers to participation (Spoth and Redmond, 1995). However, only few studies have been able to examine the factors that influence enrolment and retention in skills training interventions. Also, studies often have only limited information about those who did not participate in the intervention or they retrospectively collect data amongst non-participants.

In contrast, the *z-proso* project is one of only a handful of studies worldwide where a universal parenting programme is fully nested within a longitudinal study. Hence all data collected during the first wave of data collection can be used for prospective models of participation in the *Triple P* courses. Also, we made efforts to document all stages of participation in *Triple P* including initial enrolment, participation, completion, and actual implementation in daily life. Furthermore, *z-proso* utilises a multi-informant approach and collects information through interviews with the primary caregiver and the child as well as by way of teacher assessments, which offers the opportunity to cross-validate findings based on one informant only. Finally, the longitudinal study achieved a parent participation rate of 74 percent and a child participation rate of 82 percent meaning that results can confidently be generalised to the wider population.

How were parents motivated for participation?

The School- and Sports Department of the City Council of Zurich, in cooperation with the Swiss providers of *Triple P* and the *z-proso* research team, made great efforts to reduce participation barriers and to recruit parents into the courses. This includes a mix of written and oral information strategies, free-of-cost course participation and child-care support, as well as the possibility to attend the course not only in German but also in Albanian, Portuguese, Turkish, or English.

All eligible parents received initial written information about the project and the *Triple P* programme at the beginning of the school year. Also, accredited *Triple P* practitioners attended a parent-teacher conference in each intervention class and introduced parents to the goals and contents of *Triple P*. The parents then received a personal invitation letter. Parents with a non-German speaking background received all written information material, i.e. invitation, information leaflet, and enrolment form bilingually (in German and one of the 10 most frequently spoken languages amongst immigrant minorities). Furthermore, *Triple P International* generously supported the development of Albanian, Turkish and Portuguese trial versions of the *Triple P* course which were offered in addition to the standard German and the English courses.

The *Triple P* course comprises 4 group seminars of about 2 ½ hours each and up to 4 subsequent telephone sessions. The course was offered free of costs to all parents in the intervention group, while the regular costs are € 120 for single participants and € 180 for couples. Also, all parents were offered free

child care during the seminar evenings. To be considerate of diverse working hours of the parents, courses were held on various times during the day and evenings as well as several days during the week plus on Saturdays.

For the three trial languages (Turkish, Albanian, and Portuguese) the *Triple P* Trainers contacted every parent personally to inform them about the program, its goals and to invite them to join the programme.

Triple P Participation: an Overview

Between May and July 2005 the City of Zurich school authorities organised a total of 41 *Triple P* courses. 33 courses were delivered in German, three in Turkish, two each in Portuguese and Albanian and one in English. The German, Portuguese, and English courses were delivered by experienced *Triple P* providers selected in collaboration with *Triple P* Switzerland. Providers of the Turkish and Albanian were recruited, trained, and certified by *Triple P* Switzerland before delivering their courses.

44 parents of 257 children enrolled into the programme. This equals to at least one parent of 31 percent of the eligible children (N=822 children in the *Triple P* treatment condition) and 41 percent of the children whose primary caregiver agreed to participate in the longitudinal study. Since some parents never attended any session, the actual participation rate (i.e., at least one session attended) was somewhat lower, namely 27 percent of the eligible children. 19 percent of the target group completed the course and attended all four sessions.

The participation rate of 27 percent compares favourably with other trials that have implemented universal parenting programmes. Typically, participation rates range between 15 and 25 percent but some studies report participation rates as low as 10 percent (Spoth et al., 2000). In Germany, a recent study that used *Triple P* as a universal skills training achieved a participation rate of 24 percent (Heinrichs et al 2005).

These results demonstrate that even extensive recruitment efforts fail to attract more than a minority of parents into such a programme. This is practically relevant since the efforts made during our and similar trials would amount to significant costs if generalised to the wider population – costs that may only be acceptable if there are significant benefits resulting from the intervention. In particular, overall participation rates of the size-order achieved in the Zurich study seem less problematic if at-risk groups significantly participate in the intervention.

Table 1 Participation Rates in Triple P Programme on Different Levels of Participation

Level of Participation	% parents of children in the target sample (N = 822)	% parents of children participating in the longitudinal study (N = 573)
Enrolment	31 %	41 %
Participation (attended at least one session)	27 %	36 %
Retention (completed all four sessions)	19 %	25 %
Telephone consultations (1+)	15 %	21 %

Methodological Approach

Subsequently we show first results on who could be motivated to participate in *Triple P*. For the statistical analysis we use odds ratios (OR). Odds ratios are a measure of association that is based on comparing two groups regarding the likelihood of an event occurring. Odds ratios thus represent the likelihood of a criterion such as “high education” amongst *Triple P* participants divided by the likelihood of this characteristic amongst non-participants. An odds ratio of 1 signifies that the criterion (e.g. high education) is equally likely in both groups. An odds ratio of 2 means that the criterion is twice as likely in the target group as compared to the comparison group. Odds ratios have various desirable statistical qualities: they are relatively easy to understand, statistically robust and can be used for comparison of effect sizes across predictors (Farrington & Loeber, 2000). Odds ratios of more than 2.0 or of less than 0.5 are usually considered to be „strong effects”.

We examined three domains of possible selection processes. First, we analysed whether parents that experience parenting deficits and a negative family climate were more or less likely to participate. Second, we tested whether parents of children with behaviour problems could be reached. And third we analysed whether underprivileged parents and parents with little formal education participated in the programme. All continuous variables were dichotomised using the median as the cut-off value.

Results

To assess parenting style we use the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (Shelton et al., 1996), an instrument which differentiates five aspects of parenting. We also ask parents about the general family climate.

Findings shown in table 2 suggest that *Triple P* participants do not differ from non-participants on

three parenting dimensions, namely inconsistent parenting, poor supervision and low parental involvement. In contrast, parents who report lower levels of positive parenting (i.e., make compliments or praise the child) are more likely to enrol into the programme (OR = 1.85) and to complete all sessions (OR = 2.05). The results also show that parents who describe the family climate as less positive enrol significantly more frequently into a *Triple P* course and also remain in the courses. These are encouraging results because one goal of *Triple P* is to promote positive parenting practices and thus to contribute to a more favourable family climate.

However, the results also show that parents who report elevated levels of corporal punishment are less likely to attend a *Triple P* unit (OR = 0.62) and even less likely to completed the full course (OR = 0.48). As *Triple P* aims at breaking negative interaction dynamics that involve the use of corporal punishment, this finding implies that an important target group is underrepresented amongst *Triple P* participants.

The second group of criteria is child problem behaviour. In the *z-proso* study, child behaviour was assessed by the primary caregiver, the teacher, and the child itself. We administered the *Social Behaviour Questionnaire* developed by Tremblay et al. (1991) to all respondents. The child version uses simplified yes/no response categories and is supported by drawings. We only show results for a total aggression score in this paper.

The analyses show some encouraging results. In particular, parents who observe above-average aggressive behaviour of their child are more likely to enrol (OR = 1.99) into the *Triple P* course. They are even more likely to attend (OR = 2.11) and to complete the course (OR = 2.80) than parents who assess their child as being low on aggressive behaviour. This suggests that perceived child problem behaviour motivates parents to attend the parenting skills training. However, we found no evidence for selection in favour of the target population when examining the

teacher assessment or the child self-assessment. In other words, elevated levels of child aggressive behaviour as assessed by the teachers are about equally likely amongst non-participants as they are amongst participants of the *Triple P* course.

The analyses also suggest that despite the recruitment efforts socio-structural barriers remain highly influential. In particular, parents with above-average education levels were about twice as likely to enrol into a *Triple P* course in comparison to parents with a below-average education level (OR = 1.83), and once enrolled they were more likely to attend (OR = 2.11) and to complete (OR = 2.86) the course. Furthermore, migration background was a powerful barrier although *Triple P* was offered in several languages

spoken by immigrant minorities and special efforts had been made to recruit minority parents. Parents born outside Switzerland were about 2.5 times less likely to enrol than Swiss parents (OR = 0.38) and they were underrepresented by a factor of more than 1:5 (OR = 0.17) amongst those who completed all four sessions. Finally, we asked primary caregivers about any parenting skills programmes they had attended prior to this study, i.e. for example non-medical birth preparation courses or courses for parents of infants or toddlers. Findings suggest that parents who have previous experience with attending courses were more likely to enrol (OR = 1.87) and much more likely to complete the course.

Table 2 Selected Indicators for Participation in *Triple P*: Odds-Ratios in Comparison to All Parents Participating in the Longitudinal Study.

	Level of Participation		
	Enrolment	Participation	Completion
Parenting Style and Family Climate			
Inconsistent Parenting	1.06 (n.s.)	0.98 (n.s.)	0.99 (n.s.)
Corporal Punishment	0.74 (n.s.)	0.62 **	0.48 **
Positive Parenting	1.85 **	1.85 **	2.05 **
Poor Supervision	1.17 (n.s.)	1.17 (n.s.)	1.25 (n.s.)
Low Involvement	0.98 (n.s.)	1.13 (n.s.)	1.11 (n.s.)
Poor Family Climate	1.99 **	1.94 **	2.13 **
Aggressive Behaviour of the Child			
According to Parents	1.99 **	2.11 **	2.80 **
According to Teachers	0.92 (n.s.)	0.86 (n.s.)	0.83 (n.s.)
According to Children (self-estimates)	1.26 (n.s.)	1.28 (n.s.)	1.28 (n.s.)
Socio-cultural Background of Parents			
High education level	1.83 **	2.11 **	2.86 **
Migration Background	0.38 **	0.30 **	0.17 **
Previous Utilisation of parenting programmes	1.87 **	2.18 **	3.10 **

N = 543-571; Values are shown in odds ratios. Significant: * < .05; ** < .01.

Conclusions

The findings presented here provide a first descriptive overview of recruitment into and retention in the *Triple P* intervention as delivered in the Zurich Intervention and Prevention Project at Schools, *zipps*. The analyses show that overall an encouraging participation rate could be achieved, especially if the cultural diversity of the target population is considered. They also suggest that recruitment efforts succeeded to some extent in recruiting parents who perceive difficulties with their own parenting style, who report a more problematic climate in their family, and who perceive more aggressive behaviour problems amongst their children. Yet, no selection in the intended direction could be found for parents who use corporal punishment. Also,

while parental perception of child problem behaviour was a predictor of *Triple P* enrolment, teacher-assessed and child self-assessed behaviours were not.

Of course, multivariate analyses are needed to better understand the dynamics of recruitment and retention in universal skills trainings. However, even the results presented here demonstrate that the take-up of parents with little formal education and a migration background was very limited. For these groups more long-term motivation efforts are necessary. A possible approach might be based on the idea of creating "community readiness" (Edwards et al., 2000) in the sense of building a wider understanding for prevention goals before programmes such as *Triple P* are implemented.

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