

***Early Coparenting Programmes with Parents of Infants with a Highly Reactive Temperament. A randomised study using ‘Parents as Partners’ (PasP).***

I started my journey towards reading for a PhD in 2014. There was a lot of thought that needed to go into planning and preparing for a gap in research that would make the study worthwhile and above all that would make a contribution to knowledge and services in Malta and elsewhere.

My proposal to research about ‘early coparenting programmes with parents who described their infants as highly reactive’, was accepted by the University of Malta’s PhD committee in the latter part of 2014. This research took the form of a randomised controlled trial, using the Parents as Partners (PasP) coparenting programme as the main intervention.

Recruitment of participants meant visiting all well-baby clinics in Malta situated in Mosta, Rabat, Floriana, Qormi, Paola and eventually the new clinic in Kirkop, to meet with parents awaiting their 8 month old baby’s second routine post-natal appointment. Parents were asked to fill in the Infant Behaviour Questionnaire – Revised (IBQ-R) about their infant’s behaviour. A total of 1028 questionnaires were completed across the clinics. All parents were given feedback according to how they described their infants in the questionnaire. Those parents who described their infants as highly reactive (a total of 209) were visited in their homes. Home visits were carried out with 136 parents who accepted to be met as couples, following which an invitation to continue to participate in the research was presented to them. I was struck by the interest shown by a lot of parents to participate in the possibility of an opportunity to follow a coparenting programme. I was also struck by how busy some of the parents were and the many commitments they needed to catch up with. A few lived in dire conditions, in substandard living, or unable to afford their own home hence living with in-laws or separately together. 57 couples were in a position to accept participation, and these were randomised into an intervention group (32 couples) and a control group (25 couples). All the couples in both groups were followed monthly by a case manager to check in on them, whereas the intervention group couples attended a 16 week coparenting programme which was facilitated by trained cofacilitators, myself included. In order to keep the intervention group intimate and personal, group sizes did not exceed 8 couples, hence a total of 4 programmes were carried out over a span of nearly 2 years. Parents who attended were supported with childcare, food snacks, and parking arrangements in addition to the group support. Different measures were also used before and after the intervention for all intervention as well as control group parents. These included the IBQ-R, the Coparenting Relationship Questionnaire, as well as the Parenting Stress Index. A significant outcome was that conflict happening between the parents in front of their child reduced, the quality of positive parent-child interaction increased, and the child’s behaviour was described as more positively. This finding was consistently only evident in the intervention group. Such

findings have important implications for supporting parents, as well as important implications for the wellbeing of children's development and reducing child maltreatment.

As can be imagined this study would not have been possible without funding from different sources because of the expenses incurred. I would therefore like to express deepest my gratitude to **Endeavour Scholarships – Malta** for supporting me on this trajectory.

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