

INTERVENTION WITH AT-RISK FAMILIES; CONTRIBUTIONS FROM A PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

M^a Victoria Hidalgo*, Susana Menéndez**, José Sánchez*, Bárbara Lorence** and Lucía Jiménez*
*University of Seville and **University of Huelva

Intervention with at-risk families has changed greatly over recent decades. Thus, intervention based on welfare and deficit theory has given way to preventive intervention that seeks to strengthen and preserve families. Within the framework of this approach, there are psycho-educational programs for parents, the main characteristics of which are presented in this paper. An example of this kind of preventive intervention for parents is the family program coordinated by the Seville City Council Social and Community Services. The Programa de Formación y Apoyo Familiar (FAF, Family Education and Support Program) focuses on at-risk families that have received psychosocial intervention from Social and Community Services for family preservation reasons.

Key words: Family interventions, At-risk family, Education programs, Parent education and support.

La intervención con las familias en situación de riesgo ha cambiando mucho en las últimas décadas. De una intervención de marcado carácter asistencial y basada en la teoría del déficit, se ha evolucionado a formas de atención y actuación mucho más positivas, preventivas y encaminadas a la preservación y el fortalecimiento familiar. Dentro de esta visión actual de la intervención familiar se enmarcan los programas psicoeducativos para madres y padres, cuyas principales características son descritas en este artículo. Como ejemplo de este tipo de intervenciones se presenta el programa de Formación y Apoyo Familiar (FAF) para familias en situación de riesgo. Se trata de un programa de corte psicoeducativo y comunitario, inscrito dentro de las actuaciones que actualmente se llevan a cabo con las familias en situación de riesgo que son atendidas por Servicios Sociales Comunitarios del Ayuntamiento de Sevilla.

Palabras Clave: Intervención familiar; familias en situación de riesgo psicosocial; programas psicoeducativos para madres y padres; formación y apoyo parental.

FROM ATTENTION ON DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES TO SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK FAMILIES: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

From a classic conception, family is seen as a fundamental context where children grow-up, develop, socialize and acquire the competencies necessary to become active members of society. For adults, the importance of the family context is also well-established. Today, professionals and researchers understand that family constitutes the basic social scenario where the developmental needs of all its members should be covered. In approaching the study of the family context, understood in this light, ecological-systemic perspectives have undoubtedly been the most fruitful (Palacios, & Rodrigo, 1998), and from this approach, the family is conceived as a system made up of diverse subsystems under continuous development.

As such, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; and upon being open to the outside, it is subject to changes in an effort to adapt to the demands of the environment without losing its stability and identity over time. In summary, we are talking about an approach to studying the family that takes specifically takes into account its relational and functional features, as opposed to its more tangible and structural aspects (Minuchin, 1985).

When meeting the developmental-educational needs of all its members as independent individuals and the family system as a whole, families may use different strategies. Therefore, family diversity, which has increased greatly in recent decades, should not be understood as a crisis of the family institution; nor does it represent, in itself, a threat to the family being able to continue fulfilling its basic functions. Although family diversity can be enriching, not all family lifestyles, nor all forms of interaction, are equally functional. Unfortunately, there are many family contexts in which the basic needs of minors are not met, with the consequent threat to their development and their physical and/or psychological integrity (López, 2008). When families neither promote family health nor ensure

The original Spanish version of this paper has been previously published in *Apuntes de Psicología*, 2009, Vol. 1, No 1 and 2, 81-11

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to M^a Victoria Hidalgo García. Departamento de Psicología Evolutiva y de la Educación. Facultad de Psicología. c/ Camilo José Cela, s/n. 41018 Sevilla, Spain. E-mail: victoria@us.es

the adequate development of their members, especially children and adolescents growing up within that family, this is currently known as *families at psychosocial risk*. Although this label can undoubtedly cover a wide variety of family situations, given the complexity of the processes that lead to family psychosocial risk, we concur with Rodrigo, Máiquez, Martín and Byrne (2008) in defining these families as:

“Those in which the persons responsible for the care and education of the minor, due to personal and relational circumstances, are neglectful of their parental functions or use them inappropriately, compromising or prejudicing the minor’s personal and social development, but without the situation attaining a degree of severity that would justify a foster care order whereby it were considered appropriate to separate the minor from his or her family.” (p. 42).

Since the mid-20th century, we have seen growing concern about the functioning of at-risk families as contexts for children development. As such, a more comprehensive picture of such family scenarios has been acquired; the kinds of attention and intervention given to these families have also developed. Initially, the consideration of risk was associated with certain socio-demographic or contextual characteristics in such a way that the term “disadvantaged families” referred to a standard set of family contexts that supposedly represented a threat to the security and wellbeing of children. Indeed, historically, certain population groups were considered high-risk for children development; among these impoverished families, single-parent families, adolescent mother families and, notably, families associated with situations of social exclusion, as well as those suffering abuse situations (De Paúl, & Arruabarrena, 2001).

As a consequence of this initial understanding of risk processes, with a strong emphasis on structural aspects, the initial approaches to supporting children and families in situations of difficulty began in the 1950s, from a model based on deficit theory. This theory considered the socio-demographic characteristics of certain sectors of the population as dysfunctional, and whose shortcomings had to be palliated or compensated through intervention (Sousa, Ribeiro, & Rodrigues, 2007). From this compensatory perspective, interventions were limited to certain groups of families considered at risk due to the presence of specific socio-demographic characteristics, and with the sole objective of trying to avoid separating the minor from the home, while little attention was paid to

optimum family function. On the whole, a dichotomous appraisal of family risk predominated, which conceived two types of family: normative families—which were healthy and functioning—and families at risk that were considered multi-problematic contexts in which everything functioned poorly. Thus, a deficit-based and individualist view prevailed that was closely linked to crisis family situations, and with a strong welfare-based character (Rodrigo et al., 2008; Jiménez, 2009).

In the 1980s, both how families in situations of psychosocial risk were understood and how to work with them began to undergo substantial changes, to go beyond the limited view just described. Thus, the presence of some socio-economic indicators or certain structural characteristics began to be seen as not sufficient to understand the meaning of an “at-risk” family. At the same time, researchers and professionals became aware that focusing intervention exclusively on situations of abuse or crisis was insufficient to favor children and adult development living in these family contexts. It should be borne in mind, in this regard, that approximately 80% of homes at psychosocial risk are in situations that do not justify a foster care order; therefore, confining intervention to families in serious crisis or with abuse situations rules out support for a broader sector of families in situations of psychosocial risk (Minuchin, Colapinto, & Minuchin, 2000).

The emergence of this more mature perspective laid the bases for the appearance of a new conception of family preservation and strengthening in the last two decades. It has overcome the assumptions of mere clinical intervention with families in crisis and has paved the way for the development of services directed not only at avoiding the removal of children but at reinforcing and optimizing family functioning from a more preventive perspective (Chaffin, Bonner, & Hill, 2001; Jiménez, 2009).

In Spain, changes in the approach towards families at risk have gone hand in hand with the development of the Social and Community Services. After their introduction as such in 1980, in their initial stages, as in other countries, there was a predominance of welfare-based and negative approaches from the child protection system, which although it recognized the importance of the family for child development, it failed to conceive a legal definition for the situation of those children and adolescents growing up in family circumstances that were not serious enough to justify a foster care order, but that were of evident risk for their adequate development (Trigo, 1997; Rodrigo et al., 2008).

As De Paúl (2009) notes, there was an important change in child protection policies in Spain in 1987. First of all, the responsibility to intervene with children in situations of vulnerability or neglect was transferred to regional social and community services. Likewise, for the first time, legislative guidelines addressed the importance of positive support for the family, in contrast with the more welfare-based perspective that had predominated up to that time. Apart from that, the most relevant change came in the mid-1990s with legislation that legally protected minors (*Ley Orgánica de Protección Jurídica del Menor*) (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1996). This law introduced the concept of risk and established that the best way to ensure the protection of children is to cover the needs of minors within their developmental contexts. From this concept, the Andalusian Regional Government legislated children's rights and child protection (*Ley de los Derechos y la Atención al Menor de la Comunidad Autónoma de Andalucía*) to include a definition of family risk situations as "those where there are deficiencies or difficulties in attending the basic needs of children for their proper physical, mental and social development, and which do not give rise to their separation from the family home" (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1998). Consequently, from the perspective of the Social and Community Services in the region of Andalusia, as in the rest of Spain, the family is considered the fundamental context for ensuring the stable and appropriate development of children. Hence, family intervention sets out to support families so that they can fulfill their basic functions with the eventual aim of promoting and guaranteeing, wherever possible, the needs of minors within their families of origin (Mondragón, & Trigueros, 2004).

The *family preservation perspective*, strongly underpinned in Spain by Rodrigo et al. (2008), embraces this positive vision of family intervention and provides a broader conception of child protection (Martín, 2005). According to this more up-to-date and positive perspective, the objective with minors should be extended from protection (freeing them from abuse) towards wellbeing (promoting good treatment). As summarized by Jiménez (2009), the perspective of the preservation and strengthening of families is characterized by:

- ✓ Broadening the intervention context from specific sectors of the population (situations of abuse or socio-economic disadvantage) to all families need-

ing support to promote competences and satisfy needs of all family members.

- ✓ Understanding psychosocial risk as a continuum rather than in terms of a dichotomy. This implies assuming that family difficulties may acquire very different forms, and that it is therefore necessary to diversify services and family support types according to their needs.
- ✓ Adopting an active and positive conception for intervention with at-risk families, aimed at promoting good treatment, child wellbeing and family health.
- ✓ Stressing the importance of prevention and giving families the support they need to appropriately deal with parenting tasks and responsibilities.
- ✓ Maintaining a view of the family based on its strengths, assuring that intervention promotes parental competences, aids the personal and social development of the parents themselves and strengthens family support sources and resources.
- ✓ Taking a community approach based on co-responsibility in which community sensitivity, cooperation with families, inter-institutional coordination and the reinforcement of inherent family resources play a fundamental role.

Currently, and in most cases, the predominant perspective in services responsible for supporting and attending family needs attempts to combine the supervision and control deriving from legal considerations of child protection with the philosophy of family preservation and strengthening described above. From this perspective, family intervention can adopt a wide range of forms, including training in behavioral techniques, learning psycho-educational content and family therapy sessions (Cusick, 2000). The pertinence of one or another type of intervention will depend on the characteristics of the family and its specific support needs. Among the possible intervention types rooted in the family preservation perspective, psycho-educational support programs for parents have shown their efficacy and usefulness, especially in family situations of moderate risk. Because of this, it is probable that the systematic use of this type of program has increased in recent decades as a basic and highly valuable resource for family preservation. The characteristics of this type of family intervention are described below.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT PARENTS

Although there is enormous diversity, most psycho-educational support programs for families at risk share

an approach based on empowerment of the family, which is typical of the family preservation perspective (Rodrigo et al., 2008). In general terms, the aim of such programs is to educate and support parents to optimize their performance as parents and obtain beneficial consequences for the development of their children. In line with the principle of preservation, these programs are based on the conviction that mothers and fathers are the best source of protection for youth, and that the family constitutes the natural context where most of their basic needs should be covered. With these programs, family support is sought so that parenting functions are fulfilled satisfactorily, hence guaranteeing the protection and adequate development of the children involved (MacLeod, & Nelson, 2000).

In contrast to other types of family intervention, the most notable aspect of these programs is their *education-based and support* character. Their aim is to offer parents the opportunity to learn and develop. They involve a type of training that sets out to optimize parental performance by strengthening competences rather than approaching the situation from more traditional perspectives of overcoming deficiencies (Rodrigo, Máiquez, Martín, & Rodríguez, 2005). In accordance with this approach, these specific programs forsake the notion of an ideal father/mother model to which all men and women should aspire. By accepting the diversity of family configuration and how the parental role is carried out, these education programs for parents should support men and women by fostering and promoting their parenting skills from the recognition of individual differences, family diversity and socio-cultural contexts. Each man and woman, each family must shape its own family scenario, unique and unrepeatable on the one hand, but similar in one respect to all others: it must, in all cases, guarantee that the parents are capable of constructing a family setting that is adequate for child development, where the wellbeing of their children is assured.

The psycho-educational approach to family intervention is characterized by attempting to respond to the needs that empirical studies have revealed as most important to the mother and father role (Azar, & Cote, 2002; White, 2005). Such studies have highlighted the fact that to competently take on the task of parenting, it requires both skills related specifically to child-rearing (recognition of developmental achievements, know how to promote and support learning, use appropriate control and supervision strategies, etc.) and other more general qualities of a more socio-personal nature (good levels of

self-esteem and perception of competence, internal locus of control, satisfaction with the parental role, etc.). Therefore, these programs seek, on the one hand, to provide fathers and mothers with the necessary *knowledge and strategies* to acquire parenting skills, while at the same time promote *security and satisfaction* in these parents in their parental role, which is essential for developing abilities more closely related to their adult development, and which have been termed *personal agency* (Vallacher, & Wegner, 1989; Maíquez, Rodrigo, Capote, & Vermaus, 2000). In this line, the latest parent education programs combine the more traditional parenting-skills content (characteristics of child development, parenting styles, etc.) with other more personal content (promotion of self-esteem, coping strategies, etc.). Likewise, the content of psycho-educational programs for families at risk refers not only to the more individual aspects of the parental role, but also tends to cover other relevant aspects of family dynamics that are often sources of conflict in these families, such as the marital or intimate partner relationships themselves.

In addition to their psycho-educational character, many of the currently developed programs for families at risk consist of psychosocial interventions within the community setting. Indeed, among the basic objectives of parental education from the family preservation perspective is *to foster social support networks*. Social integration in the community and having access to adequate social networks are key aspects for ensuring good parental performance, since a large part of family needs in general, and of those of at-risk families in particular, can be met through the utilization of social and community resources (Matos, & Sousa, 2004). Psycho-educational programs for parents constitute a highly valuable and clearly fundamental source of formal social support for families in situations of risk. Nevertheless, it is essential that this formal support does not totally substitute informal support networks that the families must naturally be able to turn to (López, 2005).

Objectives related to strengthening support networks and promoting the use of community resources are clearly facilitated in psycho-educational programs through the implementation (which is customary) of group format. Using *group-work methodology* provides significant benefits in family intervention. First of all, it promotes the exchange of experiences between people in similar situations. This in turn fosters informal social support networks, which are always necessary to the parental role and especially in situations of difficulty.

Secondly, it provides a socio-cultural scenario for the construction of knowledge that enhances respect for the diversity of opinions and in learning alternative behaviors. Thirdly, group intervention with parents allows the professionals responsible for family social work to economize time and efforts.

Furthermore, in terms of methodological issues, it should be pointed out that most modern psycho-educational programs for mothers and fathers have gone beyond the academic-style “School for Parents” model and, in general, employ *experiential methodology*. As described by Máiquez et al. (2000), programs based on the experiential model consist of the reconstruction of knowledge within a socio-cultural learning context. Training parents using experiential methodology involves group work on everyday family situations in which participants, based on their implicit theories and through inductive strategies, succeed in reconstructing those everyday situations of family life together. For this methodology to be effective it is essential to encourage the *active participation* of all group members (which also fosters a sense of belonging to a small community); moreover, the sessions should be run by a *coordinator who serves as a guide or mediator*. Thus, in such programs, the figure of the professional is not that of an expert who transmits knowledge, but rather a mediator who helps the members of the group to construct that knowledge.

Finally, we should stress the *preventive* nature of this type of family intervention. Overall, these programs are not designed for families in situations of severe crisis or with deep-rooted problems in family dynamics. Rather, they seek to provide parents with resources and skills with a view to avoid the crystallization of such problematic situations. As pointed out by Rodrigo et al. (2008), these are interventions with prevention and promotion as guidelines for action. This preventive approach means that this type of program is particularly appropriate as it is the starting point for the transition to maternity and paternity, when women and men are especially motivated by the new task coming their way, or during other transition periods in the family cycle in which there are acute needs for support, such as when the children reach adolescence.

In summary, psycho-educational programs for families at risk endeavor to cover part of these families’ support needs by strengthening parental skills and ultimately achieving the *independence* and *competence* these parents need in their behavior and decisions. The eventual aim of this type of family intervention is, from

a preventive perspective, to optimize parental performance and family dynamics to guarantee and protect the development of these boys and girls within the context of their family of origin.

PROGRAMA DE FORMACION Y APOYO FAMILIAR (FAF, FAMILY EDUCATION AND SUPPORT PROGRAM): AN EXAMPLE OF PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION WITH FAMILIES AT RISK

Today, there are many countries where the authorities responsible for social policy include, as part of their action with families in situations of psychosocial risk (largely Social and Community Service users), group psycho-educational interventions aimed at supporting and educating mothers and fathers in basic parenting skills. Such programs optimize not only parental competence at an individual level but also family dynamics at a relational level (Geeraert, Van den Noortgate, Grietens, & Onghena, 2004; Lundahl, Nimer, & Parsons, 2006; Gorman, & Balter, 1997).

Sharing these objectives, within the framework of interventions for purposes of family preservation, is the *Programa de Formación y Apoyo Familiar (FAF, Family Education and Support Program)* (Hidalgo, Menéndez, López, Sánchez, Lorence, & Jiménez, 2007) described herein. The program was developed thanks to a Collaboration Agreement between the Seville City Council Social and Community Services and the University of Seville Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology and has been in operation since 2005. The program design is based on a previous research project which, by assessing 301 families—users of the Seville City Social and Community Services—explored the psychosocial profile of these families to identify their principal support needs (López, Menéndez, Lorence, Jiménez, Hidalgo, & Sánchez, 2007). Specifically, the results of that study highlighted the fact that the men and women concerned were beset by numerous and diverse stressful circumstances, and had scarce resources for coping with their situation. Their social networks, although moderate in terms of size, were not ideal in composition to provide these parents with the support they need; they showed a specific lack of emotional and informational support. With regards to the upbringing of their children, the family contexts of these individuals were quite dysfunctional, and they failed to adequately attend to the developmental needs of their children. In summary, these men and women were found to be wanting in

terms of both personal development and parental skills, which hinders them from appropriately carrying out their parenting task.

FAF Objectives, Content and Methodology

As pointed out previously, the *Programa de Formación y Apoyo Familiar* is an intervention initiative that is part of the work undertaken by professionals from the Seville City Social and Community Services. It is a psycho-educational and community program within the framework of preventive and educational activities carried out with families in situations of psychosocial risk and attended by the Social and Community Services.

Objectives

Being specifically designed to cover the needs of families in situations of psychosocial risk, the *general objective* of the program is to provide mothers and fathers attended by the Social and Community Services with a source of support that allows them to more successfully and effectively carry out their tasks and fulfill their parenting responsibilities. Such intervention with parents should have repercussions for the family system, *optimizing interpersonal relations and everyday family dynamics*. This general aim can be broken down into a series of *specific objectives*:

- ✓ Encourage parents to reflect upon their ideas about development and upbringing to enable them to perceive their sons and daughters as people who are full of potential while seeing themselves as competent rearing agents for exerting a positive influence on the development of their children.
- ✓ Increase the parents' knowledge about the developmental and upbringing process during childhood and adolescence.
- ✓ Promote satisfactory interactions between parents and children, teaching parents that there are certain ways to relate to their children that are better and more effective than others, which can be used on a daily basis.
- ✓ Increase feelings of security, competence and satisfaction in parents, both at the personal level and in their role as the person responsible for rearing their children.
- ✓ Promote personal growth and development in parents to enable them to better cope with their lives.
- ✓ Facilitate the adaptation of parents to the changes involved in the diverse transitions, both normative and non-normative, within the dynamics of the fam-

ily cycle (children reaching adolescence, situations of separation/divorce, etc.).

- ✓ Provide or arrange a meeting place for parents to facilitate the exchange of experiences and foster informal support networks.

To achieve these objectives, the FAF program is carried out with groups of mothers and fathers (mainly mothers). There are between 10 and 12 participants who are guided by a coordinator (the psychologist working in the local social and community services team).

The implementation of a program targeting such a diverse population entails certain difficulties in terms of design and the preparation of materials. Thus, the content was selected and the formal characteristics designed to enable the materials to be adapted to the characteristics, values and educational level of the different groups making up a population so that it was as broad and heterogeneous as the mothers and fathers attended by Social and Community Services.

Content

With regards to *content*, the FAF program is composed of 14 modules, grouped in five subject blocks, preceded by an introductory block. Although developmental issues and parenting skills constitute the main themes around which the work modules revolve, varied content related to working on skills of a more personal nature (problem coping strategies, knowledge of one's own capacities and self-esteem, establishment of social support networks, etc.) can be found throughout the entire program. Table 1 shows the content of each module and how the program is

<i>Module 0</i>	INTRODUCTION
Block I.	HUMAN DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES AND SCENARIOS
<i>Module 1.</i>	Child development
<i>Module 2.</i>	Adolescent development
<i>Module 3.</i>	Adult development
<i>Module 4.</i>	The family system
Block II.	PARENT-CHILDREN RELATIONS
<i>Module 5.</i>	Your role as a father/mother
<i>Module 6.</i>	Parenting socialization styles: rules and discipline
<i>Module 7.</i>	Parenting socialization styles: affect and communication
<i>Module 8.</i>	Conflict resolution
Block III.	OTHER RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE FAMILY CONTEXT
<i>Module 9.</i>	Marital/Intimate partner relationships
<i>Module 10.</i>	Relationships between siblings
Block IV.	FAMILY-COMMUNITY RELATIONS
<i>Module 11.</i>	Social support and integration into the community
<i>Module 12.</i>	Family and school
<i>Module 13.</i>	Constructive leisure time and healthy habits
Block V.	ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS
<i>Module 14.</i>	Adjustment problems during childhood and adolescence

organized in subject blocks just as they appear in the materials used by the professionals preparing the work sessions. However, neither this order nor these titles are used in the actual sessions with parents.

Each of the program modules includes a list of objectives and numerous activities (varying in duration and dynamics) to achieve these objectives. The sessions do not have a single, closed format. Rather, each professional designs his or her work sessions with the mothers and fathers, choosing from among the activities corresponding to the objective for each module, to use those activities that he or she considers most appropriate. Planning the program should take into account three aspects: The characteristics of the group of parents, the specific objectives to be achieved, and the time available to cover each of the work topics. As can be inferred from this outline, the materials are highly flexible in their structure, and the final format for each application of the program may be quite different depending on the characteristics of each group and the specific objectives pursued by the professional responsible for that group.

The extent of the content proposed and the wide variety of practical activities designed for that content should be considered within the context of the period envisaged for the application of the program, which is two consecutive years (in academic-year format) with weekly sessions, each of which is two hours.

Methodology

The methodology employed in the FAF program is of an active and experiential nature, based upon the reflection and analysis by mothers and fathers upon both their own parenting practices and those of other parents in similar situations. Specifically, the program includes some 85 activities, which although employing different techniques and strategies, are always based on the participative training model (Máiquez et al., 2000; Máiquez, & Capote, 2001). The actual procedures that facilitate the achievement of these objectives are inductive methods based upon group reflection, discussion and creation. Therefore, the activities included in the FAF program to achieve the desired objectives established for each module employing different types of group dynamics (brainstorming, debates, role-playing, case analysis, and focus groups among others). Moreover, given that the predominant educational level among the mothers and fathers participating in the program is not particularly high, much of the content is covered through hands-on

(practical) activities which, in addition to helping promote reflection, are simple and gratifying for the parents, thus reinforcing their participation.

Evaluation

To conclude this description, we should add that the design of the FAF program incorporates a provision for rigorous and systematic evaluation that is currently being carried out within a Spanish Government official research project (*I+D* SEJ2007-66105). Some preliminary data on satisfaction with the program among professionals and users is provided below.

Data on the implementation and assessment of the FAF program

The FAF program is a resource that is currently available at the twelve Social and Community Services areas operating under the auspices of the Seville City Council. Throughout the academic year, each of the Social and Community Services areas runs an FAF group that is coordinated by a psychologist and composed of 10-12 parents (mainly mothers), who are in situations of moderate psychosocial risk. Between 2005 and 2010, 325 families have actively participated in the program that concludes with an official closing ceremony where parents receive a certificate in recognition of their participation. Compared to other programs and resources, the high levels of motivation and interest shown by the mothers are indicative of its quality. This interest is reflected in the high attendance rates and active involvement in the activities highlighted by group coordinators at their timely assessments.

Since the program was introduced and coinciding with its application, its efficacy, efficiency and effectiveness have been rigorously and systematically evaluated. The early outcome assessment data obtained by means of a pre-test/post-test-type quasi-experimental design indicate the quality and efficacy of this psycho-educational intervention program. Thus, the initial comparisons between the pre-test and post-test data reveal that participants who attend the program regularly feel more satisfied with their role as a mother or father, have access to more ample support networks, acquire more knowledge about developmental and educational needs in childhood and adolescence, learn new forms of coping with family conflict, and have higher self-esteem after the intervention. These conclusions correspond closely with the satisfaction data from the users themselves, which indicate participant satisfaction with both the program content and methodology.

The professionals responsible for the implementation of the program also showed their satisfaction with the FAF program through their rating the design, implementation and assessment of the program. In fact, after delivering the FAF program, the psychologists coordinating the groups took part in an in depth evaluation of its characteristics using the Delphi technique. The preliminary analyses suggest the program's strong points lie in its methodology, materials, the objectives established, the activities designed, the module content, its duration and weekly session-format, the coordination and consultancy with the University, the participants' involvement and the coordination among professionals. Moreover, these professionals highlight the practical usefulness of the program for the Social and Community Services, as it allows them to reach a sector of family intervention that is not covered by other services; it attends many users at the same time—thus economizing resources—and it provides an opportunity for the professional enrichment of social workers. Finally, it should be noted that the program modules with the highest rating by professionals were those related to parenting practices (modules 5, 6, 7 and 8) and of the field marital/intimate partner relationships.

In summary, the data available up to now highlights the efficacy of the FAF program in responding to certain needs for support and education of families attended by Social and Community Services. This data permits us to consider psycho-educational programs for parents, like other programs currently run in Spain, as a valuable community resource for intervention with families in situations of psychosocial risk.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The creation and evaluation of the *Programa de Formación y Apoyo Familiar* (FAF, Family Education and Support Program) received support from two sources; by means of a Collaboration Agreement between the Seville City Council and the University of Seville, and from an official, Spanish Government research project (I+D SEJ2007-66105).

REFERENCES

Azar, S., & Cote, L.R. (2002). Sociocultural issues in the evaluation of the needs of children in custody decision making: What do our current frameworks for evaluating parenting practices have to offer? *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 25(3), 193-217.

- Boletín Oficial del Estado (1996). *Ley 1/1996, de 15 de enero, de Protección Jurídica del Menor, de modificación parcial del Código Civil y de la Ley de Enjuiciamiento Civil*. BOE núm. 15 del 17 de enero de 1996. Madrid: Ministerio de la Presidencia.
- Boletín Oficial del Estado (1998). *Ley 1/1998, de 20 de abril, de los Derechos y la Atención al Menor*. BOE núm. 150 del 24 de junio de 1998. Madrid: Ministerio de la Presidencia.
- Chaffin, M., Bonner, B.L., & Hill, R.F. (2001). Family preservation and family support programs: child maltreatment outcomes across client risk levels and program types. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 25, 1269-1289.
- Cusick, H. M. (2000). *Characteristics of families presenting to a family preservation program*. Kent State University Graduate School of Education, Kent, OH: Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- De Paúl, J. (2009). La intervención psicosocial en protección infantil en España: evolución y perspectivas. *Papeles del Psicólogo*, 30 (1), 4-12.
- De Paúl, J., & Arruabarrena, M.I. (2001). *Manual de protección infantil* (2ª ed.). Barcelona: Masson.
- Geeraert, L., Van den Noortgate, W., Grietens, H., & Onghena, P. (2004). The effects of early prevention programs for families with young children at risk for physical child abuse and neglect: A meta-analysis. *Child Maltreatment*, 9(3), 277-291.
- Gorman, J.C., & Balter, L. (1997). Culturally sensitive parent education: A critical Review of quantitative research. *Review of Educational Research*, 67(3), 339-369.
- Hidalgo, M.V., Menéndez, S., López, I., Sánchez, J., Lorence, B., & Jiménez, L. (2007). *Programa de Formación y Apoyo Familiar*. Universidad de Sevilla: Unpublished document.
- Jiménez, L. (2009). *Crecer en familias en situación de riesgo. Análisis evolutivo durante la infancia y la adolescencia*. Universidad de Sevilla: Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- López, F. (2008). *Necesidades en la infancia y en la adolescencia: Respuesta familiar, escolar y social*. Madrid: Pirámide.
- López, I. (2005). *La familia y sus necesidades de apoyo. Un estudio longitudinal y transversal de las redes sociales familiares*. Universidad de Sevilla: Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- López, I., Menéndez, S., Lorence, B., Jiménez, L., Hidalgo, V., & Sánchez, J. (2007). Evaluación del Apoyo Social mediante la Escala ASSIS: descripción

- y resultados en una muestra de madres en situación de riesgo psicosocial. *Intervención Psicosocial*, 16(3), 323-338.
- Lundahl, B.W., Nimer, J., & Parsons, B. (2006). Preventing child abuse: A meta-analysis of parent training programs. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 16(3), 251-262.
- MacLeod, J., & Nelson, G. (2000). Programs for the promotion of family wellness and the prevention of child maltreatment: A meta-analytic review. *Chile Abuse & Neglect*, 24(9), 1127-1149.
- Máiquez, M.L., & Capote, C. (2001). Modelos y enfoques en Intervención Familiar. *Intervención Psicosocial: revista sobre igualdad y calidad de vida*, 10 (2), 185-198.
- Máiquez, M.L., Rodrigo, M.J., Capote, C., & Vermaus, I. (2000). Aprender en la vida cotidiana. *Un programa experiencial para padres*. Madrid: Visor
- Martín, J.C. (2005). *Evaluación del programa de apoyo personal y familiar para familias en situación de riesgo psicosocial*. Universidad de La Laguna: Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- Matos, A.R., & Sousa, L.M.(2004). How multiproblem families try to find support in Social Services. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 18(1), 65-80.
- Minuchin, S. (1985). *Familia y terapia de familia*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Minuchin, P. Colapinto, J., & Minuchin, S. (2000). *Pobreza, institución y familia*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.
- Mondragón, J., & Trigueros, I. (2004). *Trabajadores sociales de la Junta de Andalucía*. Sevilla: Mad.
- Palacios, J., & Rodrigo, M.J. (1998). La familia como contexto de desarrollo humano. In M.J. Rodrigo, & J. Palacios (Coords.), *Familia y Desarrollo Humano* (pp. 25-44). Madrid: Alianza.
- Rodrigo, M.J., Máiquez, M.L., Martín, J.C., & Byrne, S. (2008). *Preservación familiar: un enfoque positivo para la intervención con familias*. Madrid: Pirámide.
- Rodrigo, M.J., Máiquez, M.L. Martín, J.C., & Rodríguez, G. (2005). El asesoramiento a familias con riesgo psicosocial. In C. Monereo, & J.I. Pozo (Eds.), *La práctica del asesoramiento educativo a examen* (pp. 139-152). Barcelona: Graó.
- Sousa, L., Ribeiro, C., & Rodrigues, S. (2007). Are practitioners incorporating a strengths-focused approach when working with multi-problem families? *Journal of Community and Applied Psychology*, 17, 53-66.
- Trigo, J. (1997). Indicadores de riesgo en familias atendidas por los servicios sociales. *Apuntes de Psicología*, 49-50, 153-170.
- Vallacher, R. R., & Wegner, D. M. (1989). Levels of personal agency: individual variation in action identification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(4), 660-671.
- White, A. (2005). *Assessment of parenting capacity. Literature review*. Ashfield, Australia: Centre for Parenting and Research.