

THE EUROPEAN FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK

Online family support in Europe

Examples, advantages and challenges

Ana Catarina Canário

Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto



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Review

The Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Family Support across Europe: A Narrative Review

Ana Catarina Canário ^{1,*} , Sonia Byrne ^{2,†}, Nicole Creasey ^{3,†}, Eliška Kodyšová ^{4,†}, Burcu Kömürcü Akik ^{5,†} , Aleksandra Lewandowska-Walter ^{6,†}, Koraljka Modić Stanke ^{7,†} , Ninoslava Pećnik ^{7,†} and Patty Leijten ³ 

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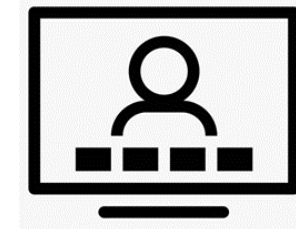
Outline

- Introduction
- Objective
- Method
- Professional and peer-led support
 - Different approaches
 - Examples
 - Benefits and/or possible disadvantages
- Conclusions
 - Advantages and challenges
 - Next steps



Introduction

- The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the provision of parenting and mental health support services to families online (Sullivan et al., 2021)
- The merit of using ICT in family support has been studied for several decades (Wade et al., 2020)
- The most frequently studied form of technology-assisted family support is programs to improve parenting practices and reduce child mental health problems |

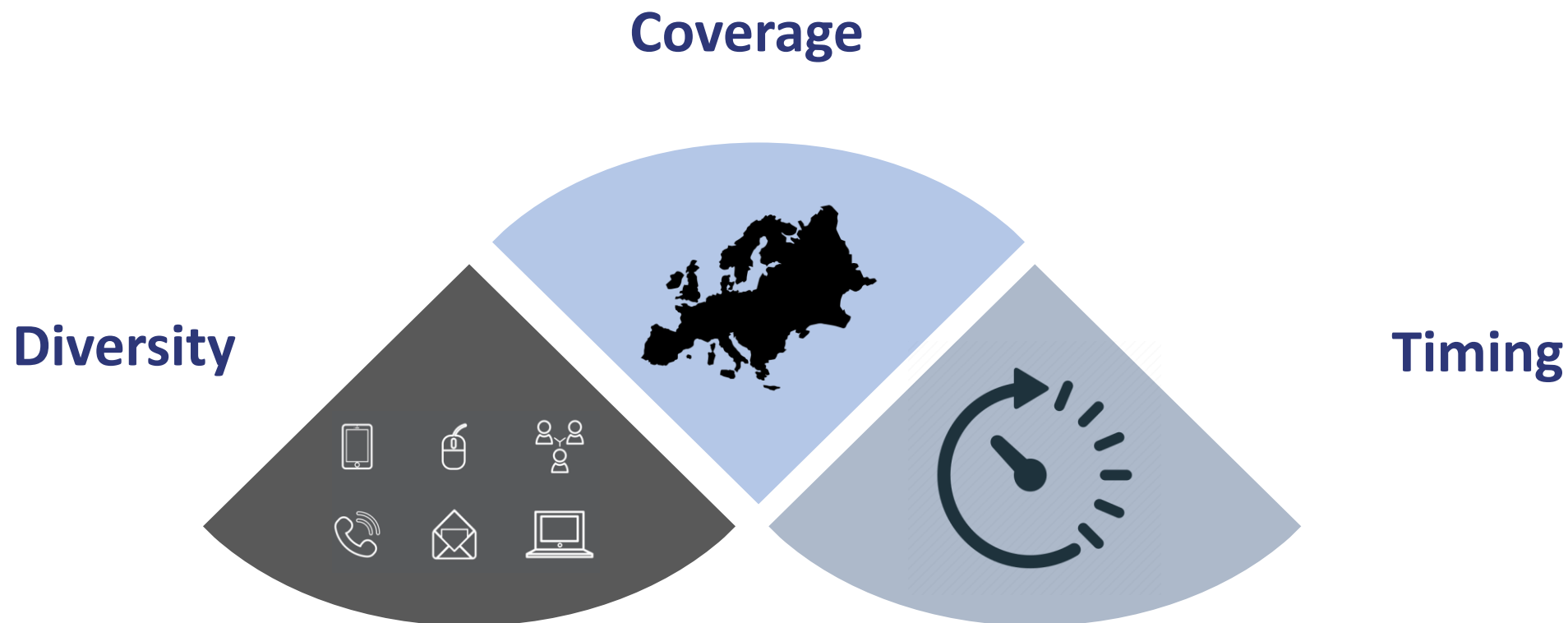


Objective

- Illustrate the diverse use of ICT in family support across Europe



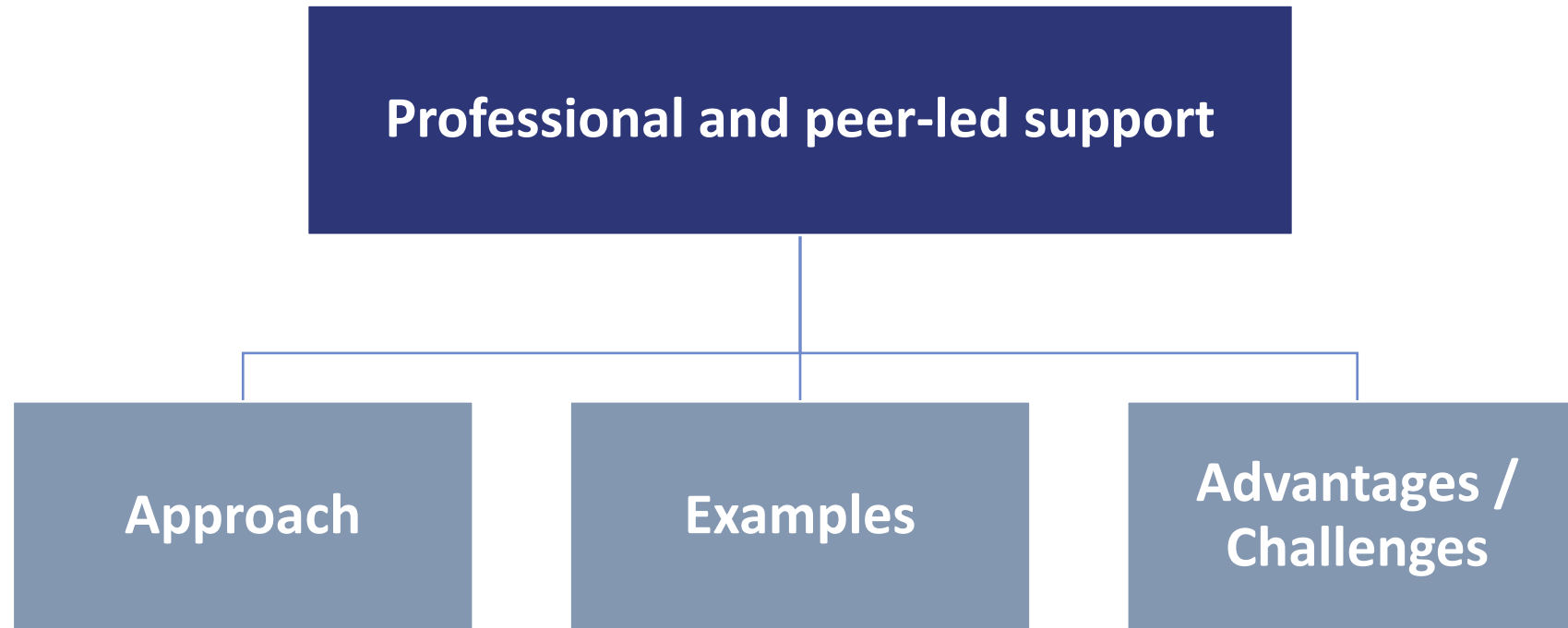
- Present examples of current practices of **professional-led** and **peer-led** support
- Discuss the potential advantages and disadvantages of different ways of using ICT in family support



Method

1. Examples provided by the EuroFamNet's WG3 participants |
2. Searches
 1. Scientific and grey literatures and in general search engines (e.g., Google) and social media websites (e.g., Facebook) |
 2. Reference lists of systematic reviews and meta-analyses on this topic (Harris et al., 2020; Nieuwboer et al., 2013; Thongseiratch et al., 2020)

Ways in which ICT can be used in family support





Professional-led support

Materials and resources that are made available by professionals which include

- Psychoeducational websites and apps
- Self-directed online resources
- Family support through video calling

Professional-led support



- Most professional-led, online family support programs are parenting programs
 - positive parenting
 - e.g., positive involvement and descriptive praise
 - proactive parenting
 - e.g., setting rules and limits
 - relationship building
 - e.g., play and other activities to improve the quality of parent–child interactions

(e.g., Enebrink et al., 2012; Sanders et al., 2012; Sourander et al., 2016)

Psychoeducation: Websites' examples



<http://www.familiasenpositivo.org/>

- Promotes and supports positive parenting by providing citizens with relevant information and directing them to available resources across the country
- Endorsed by the Spanish government

NSPCC

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/>

- Parenting tips for all stages of children's development
- Parenting advice on how to deal with difficult situations
- A positive parenting guide and a direct connection to a helpline

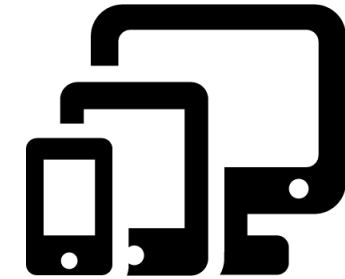
Psychoeducation: Social media and App's examples



- An app of the Parenting for Lifelong Health was developed to extend the reach of the intervention

- Social media page on Facebook
- Provides open-source and evidence-based resources focusing on building positive parent-child relationships and reducing violence against children

- Trial in Africa



- Further resources to support parents in and from Ukraine

<https://ukraineparenting.web.ox.ac.uk/downloads>

PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS ARE HEROES
PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN IN A CRISIS



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF SO YOU CAN SUPPORT CHILDREN

- When the stress is too much, take a moment for yourself.
- Listen to your breath as it goes in and out.
- You can put a hand on your stomach and feel it rise and fall with each breath.
- Then just listen to your breath for a while.

Try this every day. You are amazing.



PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS ARE HEROES
PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN IN A CRISIS



PRACTICAL WAYS TO HELP US COPE

- Even when it feels hard, try to have some daily routines for yourself.
- Routines help children feel safe. If you can, do daily routines like meals or schoolwork.
- Helping someone else can make you feel better too.

Our children learn calm and kindness from us.



Psychoeducation: App example

- Parenting App – ‘Parenting Buddy – Bebbo’ was launched in October 2021
- Was developed to reach and support parents of children aged 0 to 6 years
- Includes comprehensive, evidence-based information and interactive tools to cover many aspects of children’s health and development
- It provides parents with customized guidance according to the needs and characteristics of their child



1. Early learning
2. Health
3. Nutrition and breastfeeding
4. Responsive parenting
5. Protection and safety
6. Wellbeing of parents

<https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/22926/file>

Psychoeducation: Benefits and possible disadvantages

- **Benefits**

- Available to many families
- Useful to deliver universal information on family support and to inform families about how to access more specialized support in their area should it be needed

- **Possible disadvantages**

- Mainly allow families the opportunity to gain knowledge or obtain information, rather than providing support in the form of specialized interventions

Self-directed online programs

- This format typically includes less interaction with professionals or other parents
- Instead, many programs use written materials, videos, and assignments for practice and self-evaluation

(Jones et al., 2017)

Self-directed online programs: Examples

- **Comet** (Sweden)
 - Internet-based parent-training program for children with conduct problems (Enebrick et al. 2012)
- **Educar en Positivo** (Spain)
 - Training platform to promote parental competences on positive parenting, for parents of children of all age groups (Suárez et al., 2018)
- **Web-assisted self-help for parents of children with ADHD** (Germany)
 - Online intervention to support parents of school-aged children with ADHD or other externalizing behavior problem (Döpfner et al., 2020)
- **Family Doesn't End with a Breakup** (Czech Republic)
 - Online program for divorcing families with children of all age groups (<https://aperio.cz>)

Self-directed online programs: Benefits and possible disadvantages

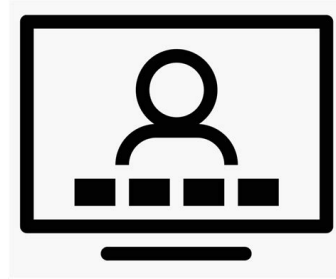
- **Benefits**

- Parents can complete the interventions at their own pace

- **Possible (dis)advantages**

- If parents have doubts or questions, how do they solve them?
 - Adding professional contact to online programs increases their effects (Harris et al., 2020; Lefever et al., 2017)
- Do parents adhere to a self-directed online program?
 - Sending parents reminders to work on the program is associated with stronger effects (Thongseiratch et al., 2020)

Family support through video calling



- Parenting programs can be delivered to parents in their homes through videoconferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom or Skype)
- This allows the professional to interact with one or more families in real-time using therapeutic techniques from the in-person program
 - Motivational interviewing, video feedback, group interaction, and role play

Family support through video calling: Examples

- **Group Lifestyle Triple P**
 - Parenting program to address children's weight-related behavior problems (Canário et al., 2021)
- **Growing Up Together–Online (Croacia)**
 - Targets parents of children under the age of 6, who raise their children in adverse parenting and life and use social welfare and/or are engaged with the child protection services (<https://bit.ly/3RufRVV>)
- **Growing Up Together in a New Family (Croacia)**
 - Targets adoptive parents and their children (aged 2 to 10) and consists of 12 workshops with several modes of delivery (<https://bit.ly/3AYPrWV>)

Family support through video calling: Examples

- **Engaging with Families in Online Rehabilitation of Children (EnFORCE, Italy)**
 - The program targets families with children with special health care needs (Provenzi et al., 2021)
- **Training program for parents of gifted children (Turkey)**
 - Group format, with 8 sessions delivered through videoconference, to parents of gifted children aged 6 to 8 (Leana-Tascilar et al., 2016)

Family support through video calling: Examples

- **Professional-led support groups for parents (Poland)**
 - Who want to strengthen their parenting competences, better understand themselves and their child, and prepare solutions for emerging difficulties (<https://bit.ly/3dZydzi>)
 - For parents of teenagers with mental health problems (<https://bit.ly/3AmJrp7>)
- **ABC parenting program delivered through videoconference (Sweden)**
 - Universal parenting program for parents with children aged 3–12 years that promote parental competence and child development (van Leuven et al., 2022)

Family support through video calling: Benefits

- Delivering family support by videoconferencing may be particularly convenient for families that find it difficult to visit a provider in person, e.g., due to work commitments or difficulties arranging childcare
- Videoconferencing may also reduce burden on practitioners by reducing the time needed to travel to the site of program delivery (e.g., a family's home or a space suitable for group work)
- Delivery by videoconferencing could improve accessibility and increase retention of families to parenting

Family support through video calling: Possible disadvantages

- When using videoconferencing technology, the ability to use such technology, a stable internet connection, and/or a quiet space in which to take a video call or take part in a self-directed program may not be available to all parents
- Socially disadvantaged families may have difficulty accessing the resources required to take part in programs offered via videoconferencing or online – it is essential that we continue to offer programs in multiple formats



Peer-led support

Form of support in which, by using online platforms, users can obtain information and support that is important to them, as well as provide assistance to other users

(Prescott et al., 2020)

Online peer support

- **Asynchronous forms**

- Internet groups, forums, or message boards where users can share important information, ask questions, and answer others' questions

- **Synchronous forms**

- Allow for constant contact with the online person on duty or with another member of the group who is currently online (e.g., chat rooms)

- Online support can be open to the public or it can be closed, whereby only a select group of users are admitted, which may or may not change over time

Online peer support: Examples



<https://www.facebook.com/totstogether>

- UK Facebook group 'Tots Together', with more than 40000 followers, creates content on parenting and lifestyle



https://www.pinterest.pt/familypumpkin/_created/

- The Instagram Portuguese group 'Pumpkin.pt', with 19000 followers, creates content on family services and leisure activities

Online peer support: Benefits and possible disadvantages

- **Benefits**

- Increased perceived support
- Decreased feeling of being stigmatized, excluded or isolated
- A sense of connection with people experiencing similar problems, and better coping with everyday problems

- **Possible disadvantages**

- How do we ensure the transmission of reliable information?
 - The lack of a moderator, specifically someone with experience in family support, may lead users to provide each other with unverified information or misinterpret information that is available on the internet

Conclusions

- + The narrative review illustrates the diverse ways in which ICT is being used to offer family support across Europe through various examples
- The examples are selective and do not present a complete picture of the use of ICT in family support services in all European countries



Conclusions

- **Advantages to delivering family support through ICT**
 - Flexible scheduling, according to the families' routines and work commitments
 - Enhanced accessibility, including engaging underserved families, enabling some family members to participate who otherwise might have not been able to, and improving access to families living in remote areas or lacking transport to attend in-person interventions

(Agazzi et al., 2021; Hopkins et al., 2021; MacDonell & Prinz, 2017)

Conclusions

- Several types of ICT-based family support may be less suitable for families at risk of problems and in need of more specialized services (MacDonell & Prinz, 2017)
- These families might benefit from other ICT-based family support, such as videoconferencing, and from in-person support
- Gaining Health and Wellbeing from Birth to Three (Spain) (Callejas et al., 2020, 2021; Rodrigo et al., 2017)
 - Promotes e-health and emotional wellbeing in children from birth to three by training parents in personal, emotional, caregiving, and educational skills

Conclusions

- While some suggest that it is more challenging to reach families with fewer resources for family support through ICT (Sullivan et al., 2021)
- Some others suggest the use of family support through videoconferencing for families experiencing social disadvantage (Harris et al., 2020)
- Even in families with little to no computer literacy, professionals and families can engage in technology-based family support with some patience and support from the professional (Wade et al., 2020)

Conclusions

• Challenges

- Families need to have access to resources that allow them to engage (e.g., devices, internet, literacy, and technology proficiency)
- Ethical issues must be considered when using online services
- Although digital/technological contact with professionals and peers can complement a lack of traditional social support (Cole et al., 2017), there are reasons to question whether it can fully replace in-person social contact and support

Next steps

- Include improving our understanding of the quality of resources available to families and determining whether they are in fact helpful
- Exposure to other types of ICT-based family support (e.g., peer-led WhatsApp groups) have not been extensively studied
- A shift is needed in research comparing the relative effects of ICT-based versus in-person family support, to research and identify the conditions under which certain families benefit more from different delivery types

Online parenting programs for children's mental health: A network meta-analysis



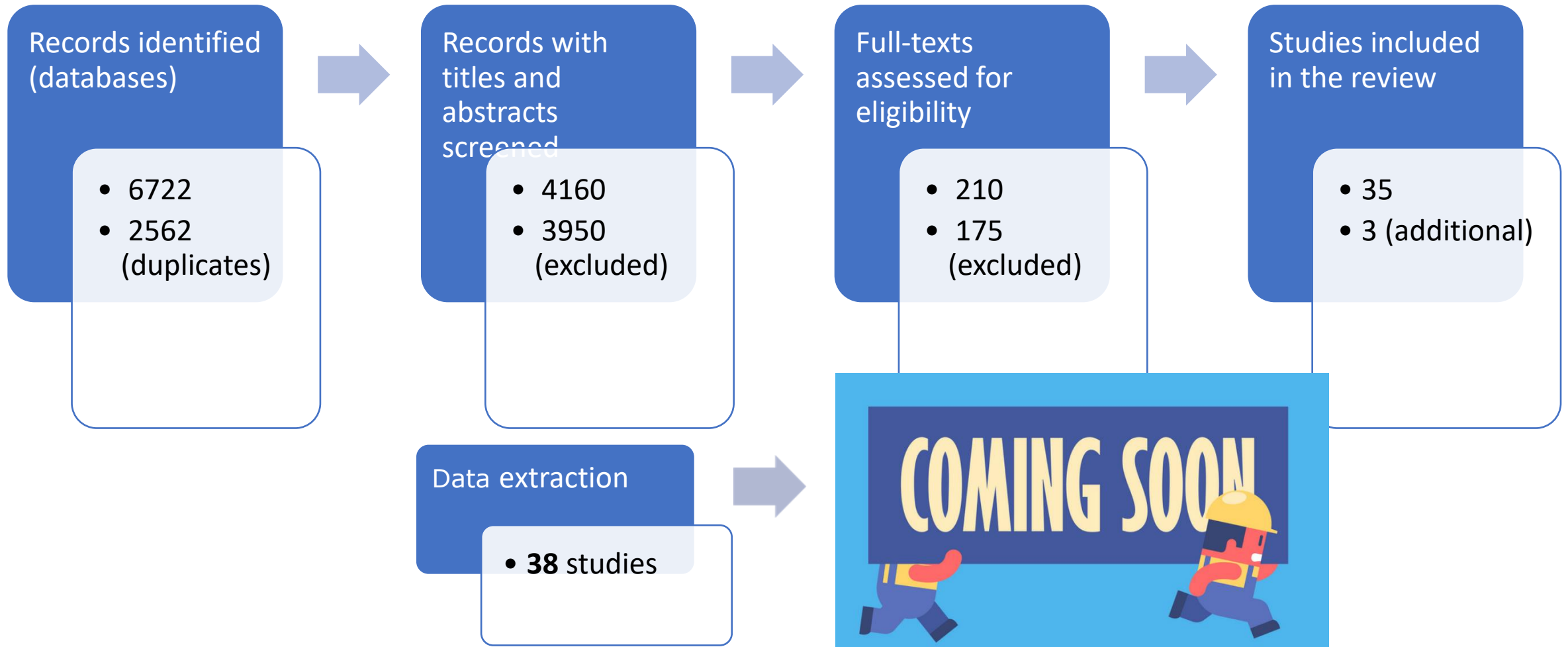
- PROSPERO 2022 CRD42022354393

https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/prospero/display_record.php?ID=CRD42022354393

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- Review question

How do online parenting programs impact on children's mental health and how program effects differ according to program-specific components?



 anacanario@fpce.up.pt



Some (more) readings...

Canário, A. C., Byrne, S., Creasey, N., Kodyšová, E., Kömürcü Akik, B., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Leijten, P. (2022). The use of information and communication technologies in family support across Europe: a narrative review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(3), 1488. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031488>

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