

'No mummy, positive parenting!'

Migrant parents and professionals on Triple P

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The book was targeted at care workers, and behavioural scientists working with families in practice and for pedagogical and social studies students.

The text has been slightly altered for translation purposes (January 2015).

“Now when I get angry, my children shout: No mummy, positive parenting!”
(Spanish mother, 48 years old, two children)

Introduction

Parenting support is something all parents should have access to. Many Dutch municipalities offer support to parents by means of the ‘Positive Parenting’ method, also known as ‘Triple P’ (Positive Parenting Program). Prior research showed that only a minority of migrant parents is aware of the existence of this kind of support. They have more difficulty in finding their way to regular providers of parenting support than Dutch parents. In addition they are more reluctant to seek formal assistance in parenting (Van den Broek, Kleijnen & Keuzenkamp, 2010; Pels, Distelbrink & Postma, 2009a). Moreover, both parents and professionals are under the impression that regular parenting support, such as Triple P, would be ‘too Western’ and therefore not fitting for all parents (ibid.). Although Triple P is put to wide use in the Netherlands and research into its effectiveness has taken place, the suitability of the programme and its effectiveness for migrant parents (with little education) have not been studied in-depth (the same goes for other parenting support programmes; see Pels, Distelbrink & Tan, 2009b).

This is why in 2009 Knowledge Lab Ten Plus¹ conducted a study ‘Triple P Diverse’, to examine whether the Triple P programme reached Amsterdam parents of non-Western origin, whether it was suitable for them and whether it worked. In early 2010 more than half of the children and young people of Amsterdam were of non-Western origin. A considerable group of Amsterdam youth is of Moroccan origin; the diversity in countries of origin of the remaining group is quite large. The average educational level of non-Western migrant parents is considerably lower than that of native Dutch parents, as we know from national data. Many non-Western parents were not born in the Netherlands. The study mapped what had already been found in earlier research on the use of Triple P for non-Western families (Distelbrink & Ketner, 2012). It also analysed the reach of the programme and studied the use of Triple P in Amsterdam practice (Distelbrink, Essayah, Van Heerebeek, Ketner & Winkelman, 2011; Ketner, Distelbrink, Harreveld & Winkelman, 2012).

This contribution presents a brief summary of the findings from the study ‘Triple P Diverse’. It also offers a number of suggestions for practice. We start with a brief description of Triple P and its target audience, followed by findings from literature about the effectiveness of Triple P for migrant parents (with little education). The focal paragraphs of this article present the experiences and recommendations of professionals and migrant parents themselves, followed by concluding remarks.²

1 The Knowledge Lab Ten Plus (‘Kenniswerkplaats Tienplus’) is a collaboration between research, policy and practice, aiming at knowledge co-production to contribute to more accessible parenting support for parents of all origins in and around Amsterdam. Next to research into the applicability of Triple P for migrant parents, Ten Plus also aims at the articulation of methodologies for bottom-up approaches of parenting support and research into the link between formal and informal parenting support. Ten Plus is funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw). Its name refers to the parents of teenagers it targeted at the outset. More information (in Dutch) can be found on the website: <http://www.kenniswerkplaats-tienplus.nl>

2 In this article we do not discuss access according to ethnicity. The Amsterdam figures we observed allow for optimism about the access of non-Western groups but they are incomplete. National data are lacking. For more details we refer to Distelbrink et al. (2011).

1. What is Triple P?

Triple P stands for Positive Parenting Program. This parenting programme originated in Australia. The programme contains an offer for parents of children from 0 to 12 and for parents of teenagers.³ The objective of Triple P is to prevent and decrease (serious) emotional and behavioural problems of children by promoting competent and positive parenting. Triple P distinguishes various levels of intervention with varying intensity, offered in a wide range of forms, such as individual counselling sessions or group courses. In this way parents receive a tailor-made offer of support, depending on the seriousness of their parenting issues.

Triple P is based on five principles: parents offer children a safe and encouraging environment, they allow children to learn through positive support, they use accountable discipline, they have realistic expectations regarding their child and they also look after themselves well. Based on these principles, various parenting strategies have been developed. These are targeted at dealing with undesirable behaviour, promoting positive contact, teaching new behaviour and stimulating desired behaviour. Parents of teenage children are offered specific skills, such as guiding teenagers in solving problems, the possible use of behaviour contracts to encourage positive behaviour, ways to handle a family council, and learning to cope with emotional or risky behaviour of teenagers. A wide range of tools has been developed to help parents master the strategies, such as DVDs, manuals and role plays.

2. Literature search into the effectiveness of Triple P for migrant parents

During our study we mapped the available research on the effectiveness of Triple P for migrant parents (with little education).⁴ We started at the international level. Triple P appears to work well for highly-educated minority (including non-Western) groups, but it has been studied primarily with Asian groups, and partly with low numbers of respondents (See: Distelbrink & Ketner, 2012). There has been very little research among non-Western parents with little education. One exception is the small-scale study among Aborigine parents in Australia who followed an adapted version of Triple P. The results suggest that the programme could also work for minority groups with little education, albeit in a somewhat adapted version. One of these adaptations was the use of testimonials of key figures, and the use of visual images of families from the community in the DVD.

Currently there are no scientific publications (articles in academic journals or PhD theses) available on the effectiveness of Triple P for migrant parents in the Netherlands. Existing publications are based on the opinions of a small number of professionals or experts (ibid.). The *Tienplus* study is the first one that offers more insight into the applicability and effectiveness based on the statements of parents and professionals themselves.

3. Practical experiences

In 2010 and 2011 researchers from Knowledge Lab Ten Plus spoke with 54 parents of various, largely non-Western origins and with education levels from low to high, and with 53 professionals in Amsterdam. Their purpose was to record experiences with Triple P and various groups of parents. The majority of the parents attended a Triple P group course (level 4). A few of them received individual advice from a pedagogical counsellor (level 3 or 4). The professionals had experience in using Triple P with various ethnic groups. One third of the professionals themselves were of non-Western origin. The parents who were interviewed had been recruited by the pedagogical counsellors who taught the courses. Moroccan women were strongly represented in the group of parents with young children (18 out of 32). This is caused partly because participants in a Arab language Triple P course for young children have also been interviewed. The respondents with teenage children (22 parents) were non-Western and Western migrants, and some Dutch parents. Most respondents were mothers.

Interviews took place individually or in groups. The interviews with professionals took place primarily in group sessions. Based on the interviews we can paint the following picture of experiences with the programme, and answer the question whether Triple P is 'too Western' to be suitable for non-Western parents.

3 Triple P also contains modules for specific target groups such as parents with obese children. These have not been included in the study.

4 The review included articles in national and international journals on the implementation of Triple P with non-Western parents until the end of 2011.

The Triple P programme

Most of the parents that we talked to are enthusiastic about Triple P. The course or the counselling sessions have provided them with a clearer insight into the causes of their children's behaviour and the way in which they can influence it through their own behaviour. Among others they have learned to be consistent, to approach children positively and to communicate with them more effectively. Professionals also feel that Triple P can work for parents of various origins, because Triple P is aimed at changing concrete (un)desired behaviour and parents can select their own targets.

Many parents feel it is very supportive to discuss practical parenting situations in a group and to share experiences. Because parents enjoy exchanging experiences and would like everyone to have a say, mothers prefer groups that are not too large. Many mothers prefer to participate in culturally mixed groups, so that they can learn from each other. They feel it is important that Dutch parents also participate, because they are eager to learn more about the Dutch way of parenting.

Too Western?

Some parents feel that in some ways the programme is 'Western', but they do not seem to have a problem with that. The key is how to combine one's own background with this 'new' information. As the mothers themselves state, after all they are in the Netherlands: their children grow up here. Based on their migrant background, some parents do indicate that they feel a need for additional themes. For instance how to combine elements from their own frame of reference with Dutch perceptions on childrearing. Professionals also indicate that some themes need to receive additional attention, particularly when supporting non-Western parents. In order of prominence these are:

Table 1 Themes which need additional attention with non-Western parents according to professionals

Parenting in two cultures/ parenting in the Netherlands
Divorce
Division of roles between father and mother
Migration history (in relation to parenting)
Sexuality / gender specific parenting
Corporeal punishment
Coping with discrimination
Coping with family and family-in-law

Meetings focused on these kinds of themes, organised in cooperation with migrant grassroots organisations or in places like school, may also serve as stepping stones for parents who are not yet familiar with the programme on offer.

The role of the professional

Earlier research demonstrates that the effectiveness of interventions depends to a large extent on the quality of the professional (e.g. Pels et al., 2009b). According to the parents that we interviewed, it is important that the course leaders are able to explain everything properly, that parents feel at ease with them and that they can be trusted. In addition, it is important that they show an interest in all participants and that everyone has an opportunity to tell their story. The course leader should be able to react adequately to the diverse situations of the parents, should be a good listener and offer proper support. The cultural background of the professionals does not really matter to most people. It is much more important that they are professional, expert and experienced.⁵ Most parents find that the professional has to be able to relate to the situation of parents with diverse (cultural) backgrounds. The professionals indicated that they always try to connect properly with the parents. However, a number of them would like to gain more skills in coping with parents from different backgrounds.

⁵ Experience with Triple P appeared to be important as well. As professionals had more experience with the programme, they judged more positively on the effectiveness for migrant parents.

Professionals also considered the presence of multilingual pedagogical counsellors an important condition to reach and retain specific subgroups of parents.

4. Ideas from good practice

In our study we wished to find out what parents and professionals see as possibilities for a better match between the Triple P offer and the wishes and needs of migrant parents. That is why we asked their advice. It appears that some issues during the course could have been handled differently, but very often parents and professionals deal with those themselves. In this chapter we discuss several of such experiences and give some suggestions to professionals.

Language

The predominant use of speech in Triple P may be a barrier to some parents, according to both parents and professionals. Both the quantity of written material and its complexity play a part. Parents whose mother tongue is not Dutch, indicated that support in their first language would have been good. Professionals search for solutions in practice. They give more expansive verbal explanations to parents, explain specific passages beforehand in the tip sheets that parents take home, or loan them the DVD to watch again quietly at home. One point of attention is the translated material (DVD, manual, tip sheets). In one neighbourhood in Amsterdam an experiment was conducted during the study with offering Triple P in the mother tongue; here the course for parents of young children was offered in Arabic. This was highly appreciated by participants and the parenting counsellors also felt it to be a positive offer.

Pace

Most parents, both migrant and Dutch parents, felt the course's pace to be too high. Parents would have liked more or longer sessions. Also they would have appreciated to have more time between sessions, because it allows for more time to try out and practice the new approach at home. Some parents also suggested the possibility of refresher or practice sessions with an opportunity to stay and talk. The professionals agree that especially the courses, also because of the pace, are difficult to access for parents without a strong command of Dutch. They do not easily refer parents to the course if they expect language to be a barrier. Something that does happen in practice is 'stacking': professionals start by supporting parents through the individual offer and later refer them to a course, to allow them more time to get acquainted with the basics of Triple P. Working with non-Western parents (with low education) in practice can necessitate additional time and attention, because of the language but also because the concept of 'positive parenting' is new to them.

Additional investment

The recruitment of migrant parents with low education often calls for additional investment. Personal recruiting and working with key persons or intermediaries are essential in order to reach non-Western parents, as is clear from the interviews. Therefore the motto of the organisations and professionals who work with Triple P is: invest more in reaching parents who are not used to formal parenting support, help parents in their own language or with translated materials if necessary, and take more time for them. One of the ways to get in touch with parents on parenting and to familiarise them with a programme such as Triple P, is to pay attention to themes that concern migrant parents, for instance the relation between their own values and those in their Dutch environment. This approach may also be helpful to keep parents interested and involved once they are participating.

Table 2 Suggestions for applying Triple P with migrant parents

<p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add additional themes (see Table 1) <p>Recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruit in places where parents already are present (schools, migrant grassroots organisations)• Informal contacts, such as working with intermediaries• Recruitment by bilingual or multilingual professionals <p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use visual tools in addition to written tools• Use translated course materials• Give oral explanation with materials/questionnaires• Offer the course in parents' mother tongue <p>Pace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adjust the pace to groups with low education• 'Stack' the offer• Additional investment in attention and time to explain 'positive parenting' <p>Additional investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More time available to professionals, among others for recruitment• Enough time for professionals to familiarise themselves with Triple P• Strengthen the diversity competencies of professionals
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Finally

Triple P as a parenting programme is becoming more and more popular in the Netherlands. In many cities (for instance Amsterdam) migrant parents form a large part of the target population. Our study shows that little is known in international or Dutch research about the actual use and effectiveness with minority groups with little education.

The experiences of this group of a hundred parents and professionals with whom we discussed Triple P are cause for optimism. The parents who had participated in the programme felt more sure of themselves as parents, and professionals also felt that parents, no matter what their origin, are able to participate in the programme. But there also is room for improvement.

Academic research into the effectiveness of Triple P with migrant parents with low education is an important step forward in demonstrating that this is a suitable method to concretely support parents with diverse origins and levels of education.

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Authors' postscript (2015)

In 2013 a four-year research programme has started in the region of Amsterdam to study the effectiveness, access and reach of Triple P teenagers (level 4). This programme is funded by SIA National Coordinating body for practice based research and uses a mixed methods approach (quantitative effect research and qualitative in-depth research). This study is expected to deliver information on the implementation, effectiveness and appreciation of Triple P teenagers by professionals and parents with various social and ethnic backgrounds, also non-Western parents. Contact persons for the study are Pauline Naber (pauline.naber@inholland.nl) and Marjolijn Distelbrink (mdistelbrink@verwey-jonker.nl).

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