Child Safety Research Conference

Child Protection – integrating research policy practice

Learning from each other and creating new knowledge

The Parents Under Pressure program

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The Parents Under Pressure program (PUP)

The PUP program was developed to improve child outcomes in multi-problem, high-risk families, e.g.,

- families where substance misuse is a problem
- families with child protection issues
- families with a parent in prison
Risk and protective factors in families

**Protective**

**Parental factors**
- Parenting skills - clear rules of conduct, consistently enforced
- Monitoring of children’s activities
- Emotional regulation
- Problem solving skills

**Child factors**
- Easy temperament
- Success in school
- Connected to pro-social peer group

**Family factors**
- Strong and positive family attachments
- Involvement of family in community (e.g., school, clubs)
- Social support, manageable life stressors

**Risk**

**Parental factors**
- Substance abuse or suffer a mental illness
- High levels of depression and anxiety
- Single parent families
- Younger at birth of first child

**Child factors**
- Failure in school
- Poor social coping skills
- Behavioural problems
- Deviant peers

**Family factors**
- Poor parent-child attachment
- Greater number of life stressors
- Poor social support
- Chaotic home environments
- Live in environments with crime, drug dealing and extreme social disadvantage
Summary: Interventions for high-risk parents

- Multi-problem families require treatments that address issues across multiple ecological levels (parent, child, family, community)

- Acknowledging and working with severe psychological distress of parents is often necessary before parenting strategies can be implemented

- Flexible treatments need to be able to respond to range of life crises facing the family
Parents Under Pressure Program: Overview

- 10 modules
- Structured, non-sequential, i.e., order in which modules delivered depends on:-
  - Priorities- mutually agreed on following assessment
  - “Checking out” at the beginning of each session
- Primarily home-based but extensive liaison with other agencies required – school, social services etc
- Include both parents of they are both around
- Manualised
- Therapists receive regular supervision
Parents Under Pressure Program: Content

Units 1& 2: Assessment, Feedback and “Checking Out

Unit 3: View of self as a parent

Unit 4: How to under pressure

Units 5: Mindful Play

Units 6: Mindful child management

Unit 7: Lapse and relapse

Unit 8: Extending Support Networks

Unit 9: Life Skills

Unit 10: Relationships

Family crises that present in sessions are treated as a “therapeutic opportunity” to teach/encourage problem solving or distress tolerance, throughout the program.
Parents Under Pressure Program: Content

Units 1& 2: Assessment, Feedback and “Checking Out”

- Aim of assessment is to set clear and meaningful targets for change. This is done collaboratively and develops a partnership.
- Targets for change may be in any ecological domain.
- Process should be non-adversarial, respectful, therapeutic.
- The assessment process aims to highlight that there are multiple influences on parenting ability.
- Important to highlight areas of competence and emphasise how these areas of strength will help achieve change in other areas.
Assessment based on: -

- Interview
- Self-report measures
- Direct observation of parent-child interaction
- Feedback and “checking out” to determine goals are mutually agreed
- Therapeutic use of feedback – including video-feedback
Parents Under Pressure Program: Content

Unit 3: View of self as a parent

• Replace underlying schema “I am a bad parent” with the positive schema “I am a good enough parent”

• Replace notion of an ideal parent with that of a “good-enough” parent

• Acknowledge what the parent does well (e.g., video feedback)

• Challenge notion of an ideal child (encourage realistic expectations)
Unit 4: How to under pressure

- Monitoring and managing emotions
- Accepting the unchangeable - distress tolerance skills
- Thinking positively and challenging negative thinking
- Relaxation, self-soothing activities
- Healthy body, healthy mind
- Making time for pleasant activities
- Mindfulness skills
Mindfulness is bare attention of the present moment.

The perception of the senses without judgment or interpretation.

Mindfulness includes being aware of the internal mind stream, (thoughts, images) and their role as a distraction in maintaining bare attention.

The goal of mindfulness is to be in control of your own mind, instead of letting your mind be in control of you.
Parents Under Pressure Program: Content

Units 5: Mindful Child Play

Aim is to increase the child’s good behaviour and improve the parent-child relationship

- Modelling prosocial behaviour
- Acknowledging & rewarding good behaviour
- Mindful play - observing, describing, participating in the moment
- Tolerating negative emotions in play (adopting a non-judgemental stance)
- Connecting with your child
Mindfulness skills: Connecting with your child

• **Observing:** Paying attention to what the child is actually doing. Letting go of other thoughts and just mentally focusing all of your attention on the child and what they are doing.

• **Describing:** Adding a descriptive label to what you are observing. Describing what is: without judgment of whether it is good or bad, right or wrong

• **Participating:** Joining in totally, responding spontaneously, letting go of self-consciousness, joining in, becoming involved; to act intuitively from wise mind
Parents Under Pressure Program: Content

Units 6: Mindful child management

Aim is to decrease undesirable child behaviour

- Identifying unacceptable behaviour
- Getting into the right frame of mind
- Use wise mind rather than emotion mind
- Limit setting
- Non-punitive discipline
Parents Under Pressure Program: Content

Forms of corporal punishment

“Instrumental” punishment that is planned, controlled, and not accompanied by strong parental emotion.

“Impulsive” spur-of-the-moment punishment accompanied by feelings of anger and often the feeling of being out of control.
Unit 7: Lapse and relapse

- Non-judgemental
- Identifying and planning for high-risk situations
- Alternative to drug/ alcohol use
- Dealing with cravings and urges
- Harm minimisation/ Planning drug/ alcohol use
- Lapse
- Ways of dealing with risky, harmful, hazardous drinking
- Low risk drinking
- Controlled drinking
Parents Under Pressure Program: Content

Unit 9: Life Skills

• Support is important but not always there
• Identifying support people
• Financial planning (Budgeting)
• Diet/Nutrition
• Employment and education
• Housing
• Centrelink (forms & entitlements)
• Directory of welfare agencies
Parents Under Pressure Program: Content

Unit 10: Relationships

- Communicating
- Clarifying roles
- Satisfaction and acceptability of the relationship (deciding when enough is enough and considering options)
- Single parents
Research Evidence
The research evidence

1. Published pilot study of 9 families: single case study approach

2. Large NH&MRC grant comparing intensive PUP, parenting skills only and usual care – completed with good results.

3. Large scale project evaluating dissemination of PUP in a number of methadone clinics across NSW funded by Drug Programs Bureau of NSW Health Dept.

4. Pilot study of parents in women’s prison.

5. Recent investigation into PUP babies.


7. PUP has been disseminated in ATODS clinics in Brisbane, Townsville, Cairns, Toowomba. Pilot work is being undertaken with 3 indigenous workers have been trained and are currently trialing and adapting to the needs of indigenous families.
The research evidence

Results of the RCT

Three conditions

1. Intensive
   - 12 sessions
   - delivered in the home

2. Brief
   - 2 sessions
   - delivered in the Clinic

3. Standard care
The research evidence

Results of the RCT

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The research evidence

Results of the RCT

• 64 parents assessed
• 84% of sample were mothers
• Mean age was 30.3 years (SD = 6.4)
• Mean age of target child was 3yrs 5mths
• 61% of target children were male
• Mean time on methadone 39 months
The research evidence

Results of the RCT

Measurements over 4 domains of functioning

• Parent
  • drug use, psychological problems, parenting style

• Child domain
  • child behaviour and emotional functioning

• Parent-child relationship
  • parenting skills (behavioural observation)

• Social context
  • risk taking behaviour, stress, support
Results of RCT

Parenting Stress Index - Total Score

Sample Questions:

- I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent.
- I often have the feeling that I cannot handle things very well.
- My child turned out to be more of a problem than I expected.
Results of RCT

Child Abuse Potential Inventory - Total Score

Sample Questions:

- Spanking that only bruises a child is ok.
- It is ok to leave a child in a dirty nappy.
- Sometimes I fear that I will loose control of myself.
Results of RCT

Child Abuse Potential Inventory - Rigidity Scale

![Graph showing changes in CAPI rigid scores across Pre, Post, and FU]
Results of RCT

Strengths and Difficulties Scale - Total Score

[Graph showing changes in Total Score from Pre to Post to FU for SC, BI, and PUP groups]
Results of RCT

Strengths and Difficulties Scale - Prosocial Scale

![Graph showing changes in SDQ Prosocial scores over time for different groups.](image)
Results of RCT

Methadone Dose

Graph showing the trend of Methadone dose over time (Pre, Post, FU) with different symbols for SC, BI, and PUP.