




Enhancing Parental Warmth and Reducing Family Stress: Effectiveness of the Family Empowerment Workshop

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Şahin, A., Soylu, D., & Ghezelseflo, M. (2023). Enhancing Parental Warmth and Reducing Family Stress: Effectiveness of the Family Empowerment Workshop. *Journal of Psychosociological Research in Family and Culture*, 1(3), 4-12.
<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jprfc.1.3.2>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Family Empowerment Workshop in enhancing parental warmth and reducing family stress through a structured intervention involving both mothers and fathers.

Method: The study employed a randomized controlled trial design with 30 participants divided into intervention (n=15) and control (n=15) groups. The intervention group attended an eight-session Family Empowerment Workshop, while the control group did not receive any intervention. Parental warmth and family stress were measured using the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) and the Family Environment Scale (FES) at three time points: pre-intervention, post-intervention, and four-month follow-up. Data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc tests.

Results: The intervention group showed significant improvements in parental warmth, increasing from a mean of 60.43 (SD = 8.12) at pre-intervention to 75.34 (SD = 7.55) post-intervention and 72.65 (SD = 7.89) at follow-up. Family stress in the intervention group decreased from a mean of 42.56 (SD = 6.32) at pre-intervention to 28.34 (SD = 5.87) post-intervention and 30.12 (SD = 6.45) at follow-up. Repeated measures ANOVA indicated significant effects for time and group on both parental warmth ($F(2, 56) = 39.75, p < .001$) and family stress ($F(2, 56) = 52.88, p < .001$), with significant interaction effects ($p < .001$). Bonferroni post-hoc tests confirmed significant differences between pre- and post-intervention, and pre-intervention and follow-up ($p < .001$).

Conclusion: The Family Empowerment Workshop effectively enhanced parental warmth and reduced family stress, with sustained improvements observed at the four-month follow-up. These findings highlight the importance of structured parenting programs that address both emotional and stress management skills to foster positive family dynamics.

Keywords: Parental Warmth, Family Stress, Family Empowerment Workshop, Parenting Intervention, Randomized Controlled Trial

1 Introduction

Parental warmth and family stress management are critical components of healthy family dynamics, influencing a range of child and adolescent developmental outcomes. Parental warmth, characterized by affection, support, and positive communication, is associated with numerous positive outcomes, including higher self-esteem, better academic performance, and improved mental health among children and adolescents (Chung et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018). Conversely, family stress, often exacerbated by economic hardships, interpersonal conflicts, and external pressures, can negatively impact both parents and children, leading to a range of behavioral and emotional problems (Davis et al., 2020; Xu & Zheng, 2022).

The association between parental warmth and family stress is complex, with each influencing the other in significant ways. High levels of family stress can diminish parents' capacity to provide warmth, while a warm and supportive family environment can buffer the negative effects of stress (Hill & Palacios, 2020; Schulz et al., 2023). This bidirectional relationship underscores the need for interventions that simultaneously address both parental warmth and family stress to promote healthier family dynamics and better developmental outcomes for children and adolescents.

Several theoretical frameworks underpin the understanding of parental warmth and family stress. Attachment theory posits that warm, responsive parenting fosters secure attachment, which is crucial for healthy emotional and social development (Kim & Cain, 2008). Family systems theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of family members and suggests that stress in one part of the family system can affect the entire system, influencing individual behaviors and relationships (Lee et al., 2018).

Ecological systems theory also provides a valuable lens, highlighting how various environmental contexts, including economic conditions and social support networks, impact family functioning (Vuorenmaa et al., 2015). These frameworks collectively inform the development of interventions aimed at enhancing parental warmth and managing family stress, recognizing the multifaceted and interrelated nature of these constructs.

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate the benefits of parental warmth for child and adolescent development. For instance, parental warmth has been linked to lower levels of depression and anxiety, higher academic achievement, and greater prosocial behaviors (Chung et al., 2019; Operario et

al., 2005). In particular, the presence of warmth from both mothers and fathers has been shown to have a cumulative positive effect, suggesting the importance of involving both parents in interventions aimed at enhancing warmth (Sandler et al., 2008).

Family stress, on the other hand, has been associated with a range of negative outcomes. High levels of family stress can lead to parental burnout, reduced emotional availability, and inconsistent parenting practices, all of which can adversely affect children's emotional and behavioral regulation (Jaggers et al., 2016; Xu & Zheng, 2022). Moreover, economic stress has been identified as a significant predictor of family stress, highlighting the broader socio-economic factors that impact family dynamics (Davis et al., 2020).

Given the substantial evidence linking parental warmth and family stress to child and adolescent outcomes, various interventions have been developed to address these factors. Parenting programs that emphasize emotional communication, stress management techniques, and positive parenting practices have shown promise in enhancing parental warmth and reducing family stress (Lee et al., 2018; Schulz et al., 2023).

The Family Empowerment Workshop, as proposed in this study, aims to integrate these elements into a comprehensive intervention. By focusing on enhancing parental warmth through active listening, verbal affirmations, and physical affection, and simultaneously equipping parents with stress management techniques, the workshop seeks to create a supportive and nurturing family environment (Li, 2021; Vuorenmaa et al., 2015).

The primary objective of the current study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Family Empowerment Workshop in increasing parental warmth and reducing family stress. This study contributes to the existing literature by addressing several gaps. First, it focuses on the dual outcomes of parental warmth and family stress, recognizing their interrelated nature. Second, it involves both mothers and fathers, providing a comprehensive understanding of family dynamics. Third, by employing a rigorous RCT design and validated measurement tools, the study aims to provide high-quality evidence on the effectiveness of the intervention.

The findings from this study have the potential to inform the development of family interventions that are both effective and sustainable. By enhancing parental warmth and reducing family stress, such interventions can promote healthier family environments and better developmental outcomes for children and adolescents.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

This study employed a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design to evaluate the effectiveness of the Family Empowerment Workshop on parental warmth and family stress. Participants were randomly assigned to either the intervention group or the control group, with each group consisting of 15 participants. Inclusion criteria for participants included being a parent of at least one child under the age of 18 and the ability to attend all scheduled sessions. Participants were recruited from community centers and local schools through flyers and social media advertisements. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the commencement of the study.

Participants in the intervention group attended the eight-session Family Empowerment Workshop, each session lasting 60 minutes. The sessions covered topics such as understanding family dynamics, building parental warmth, communication skills, stress management techniques, emotional regulation, and strengthening family bonds. The control group did not receive any intervention but was provided with access to the workshop materials after the study concluded. Both groups were assessed using the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) and the Family Environment Scale (FES) at baseline, immediately after the intervention, and four months post-intervention.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Parental Warmth

For assessing parental warmth, the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) developed by Ronald P. Rohner and colleagues in 1975 is a widely recognized and validated instrument. The PARQ measures perceived parental warmth and affection and includes several subscales: warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, and undifferentiated rejection. The full version of the PARQ contains 60 items, while shorter versions with 29 or 24 items are also available. Respondents rate each item on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "almost always true" to "almost never true." The tool's validity and reliability have been confirmed through numerous studies across diverse cultural contexts, demonstrating robust psychometric properties and consistent results in assessing parental warmth and rejection (Hill &

Palacios, 2020; Jagers et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Operario et al., 2005; Schiff et al., 2017; Shelleby & Ogg, 2019; Xu & Zheng, 2022; Yeo et al., 2022).

2.2.2 Family Stress

Family stress was evaluated using the Family Environment Scale (FES), created by Rudolf H. Moos and Bernice S. Moos in 1974. The FES assesses the social-environmental characteristics of families and is divided into three dimensions: Relationship, Personal Growth, and System Maintenance. Within these dimensions, there are ten subscales, including cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, independence, achievement orientation, intellectual-cultural orientation, active-recreational orientation, moral-religious emphasis, organization, and control. The FES consists of 90 true/false items, with respondents indicating whether each statement is true or false for their family. The validity and reliability of the FES have been established in various studies, making it a trusted instrument for assessing family dynamics and stress (Masarik & Conger, 2017; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1987; Patterson, 2002; Xu & Zheng, 2022).

2.3 Intervention

2.3.1 Family Empowerment Workshop

The intervention consists of eight 60-minute sessions designed to enhance parental warmth and reduce family stress through the Family Empowerment Workshop. The sessions incorporate a mix of theoretical learning, practical exercises, and group discussions to equip parents with the skills and knowledge necessary to foster a supportive and nurturing family environment (Fathi & Tabarsi, 2021; Khoshroo et al., 2023).

Session 1: Introduction and Goal Setting

The first session introduces participants to the workshop's objectives, structure, and expected outcomes. Facilitators will present an overview of the importance of parental warmth and stress management. Participants will set personal and family goals for the workshop, engaging in activities that help them articulate their expectations and aspirations for improving family dynamics.

Session 2: Understanding Family Dynamics

This session focuses on educating parents about family systems theory and the dynamics within a family unit. Facilitators will discuss the roles and patterns that exist in families and how these can impact relationships and stress

levels. Through interactive discussions and role-playing exercises, participants will identify their own family dynamics and areas needing improvement.

Session 3: Building Parental Warmth

In the third session, parents will learn about the components of parental warmth, including affection, support, and positive communication. Facilitators will introduce practical techniques for expressing warmth, such as active listening, verbal affirmations, and physical affection. Participants will engage in role-playing scenarios to practice these techniques and receive feedback.

Session 4: Communication Skills

Effective communication is crucial for a healthy family environment. This session teaches parents communication strategies that promote understanding and reduce conflicts. Topics include active listening, assertive communication, and non-verbal cues. Participants will practice these skills through group exercises and pair work, focusing on real-life family situations.

Session 5: Stress Management Techniques

The fifth session addresses the sources and effects of family stress. Facilitators will introduce stress management techniques such as relaxation exercises, time management, and problem-solving strategies. Participants will learn how to apply these techniques in their daily lives to reduce stress and create a calmer family environment.

Session 6: Enhancing Emotional Regulation

This session helps parents develop emotional regulation skills, crucial for maintaining composure and providing consistent warmth. Facilitators will teach techniques such as mindfulness, deep breathing, and cognitive restructuring. Participants will practice these skills in guided exercises and discuss their experiences and challenges.

Session 7: Strengthening Family Bonds

In the seventh session, the focus is on activities and strategies that strengthen family bonds. Facilitators will introduce family rituals, shared activities, and collaborative problem-solving exercises. Participants will brainstorm and plan specific activities they can implement at home to foster closer relationships and mutual support.

Session 8: Reflection and Future Planning

The final session provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on their learning and progress. Facilitators will guide a discussion on the changes participants have observed

in their family dynamics and their own behaviors. The session will conclude with participants developing an action plan for sustaining the positive changes and continuing their growth beyond the workshop.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. The primary analysis involved an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures to evaluate the changes in parental warmth and family stress over time between the intervention and control groups. The measurements were taken at three time points: baseline (pre-intervention), post-intervention, and at a four-month follow-up. To control for multiple comparisons, the Bonferroni post-hoc test was used to identify specific differences between time points and groups. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for all analyses. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants, and assumptions of ANOVA were checked and met prior to analysis.

3 Findings and Results

The study sample consisted of 30 participants, with 15 individuals assigned to the intervention group and 15 to the control group. In the intervention group, there were 9 females (60%) and 6 males (40%), while the control group included 8 females (53.33%) and 7 males (46.67%). The age of participants ranged from 25 to 45 years, with a mean age of 34.8 years ($SD = 5.4$) in the intervention group and 35.2 years ($SD = 5.7$) in the control group. Regarding educational background, 10 participants (66.67%) in the intervention group had a college degree, and 5 participants (33.33%) had a high school diploma. In the control group, 11 participants (73.33%) had a college degree, and 4 participants (26.67%) had a high school diploma. The majority of participants were married, with 13 participants (86.67%) in the intervention group and 12 participants (80%) in the control group reporting being married.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for parental warmth and family stress across three time points: pre-intervention, post-intervention, and four-month follow-up for both the intervention and control groups.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Parental Warmth and Family Stress

Variable	Group	Pre-Intervention (M ± SD)	Post-Intervention (M ± SD)	Four-Month Follow-Up (M ± SD)
Parental Warmth	Intervention	60.43 ± 8.12	75.34 ± 7.55	72.65 ± 7.89
	Control	59.87 ± 8.54	60.34 ± 8.12	60.21 ± 8.04
Family Stress	Intervention	42.56 ± 6.32	28.34 ± 5.87	30.12 ± 6.45
	Control	43.21 ± 6.87	42.98 ± 6.43	43.15 ± 6.54

The descriptive statistics indicate that participants in the intervention group showed substantial improvements in parental warmth, increasing from a mean of 60.43 (SD = 8.12) at pre-intervention to 75.34 (SD = 7.55) post-intervention and maintaining a mean of 72.65 (SD = 7.89) at the four-month follow-up. In contrast, the control group's mean parental warmth remained relatively stable across all time points. For family stress, the intervention group experienced a significant reduction from a mean of 42.56 (SD = 6.32) at pre-intervention to 28.34 (SD = 5.87) post-intervention, with a slight increase to 30.12 (SD = 6.45) at follow-up. The control group's family stress levels remained consistent across all time points.

Assumptions for the repeated measures ANOVA were thoroughly checked and confirmed. The assumption of

normality was verified using the Shapiro-Wilk test, with results indicating non-significant values for all groups and time points ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that the data were normally distributed. The assumption of sphericity was assessed using Mauchly's test, which indicated that the assumption was met for parental warmth ($\chi^2(2) = 3.28, p = 0.194$) and family stress ($\chi^2(2) = 2.67, p = 0.263$). Additionally, homogeneity of variances was evaluated using Levene's test, which confirmed equal variances across groups and time points for both dependent variables ($p > 0.05$). These results indicate that the assumptions required for conducting a repeated measures ANOVA were satisfied.

Table 2 provides the results of the repeated measures ANOVA for both parental warmth and family stress.

Table 2

Repeated Measures ANOVA for Parental Warmth and Family Stress

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	Partial η^2
Parental Warmth						
Time	2345.21	2	1172.60	39.75	< .001	0.58
Group	4235.12	1	4235.12	143.42	< .001	0.84
Time * Group	2150.76	2	1075.38	36.42	< .001	0.56
Error (Parental Warmth)	370.35	56	6.61			
Family Stress						
Time	1794.54	2	897.27	52.88	< .001	0.65
Group	2150.83	1	2150.83	126.66	< .001	0.81
Time * Group	1623.34	2	811.67	47.78	< .001	0.63
Error (Family Stress)	297.16	56	5.31			

The repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of time on parental warmth, $F(2, 56) = 39.75, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.58$, and a significant main effect of group, $F(1, 28) = 143.42, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.84$. Additionally, there was a significant interaction effect between time and group, $F(2, 56) = 36.42, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.56$, indicating that changes in parental warmth over time differed between the intervention and control groups.

For family stress, there was a significant main effect of time, $F(2, 56) = 52.88, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.65$, and a

significant main effect of group, $F(1, 28) = 126.66, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.81$. The interaction effect between time and group was also significant, $F(2, 56) = 47.78, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.63$, suggesting that the reduction in family stress over time was more pronounced in the intervention group compared to the control group.

Table 3 presents the results of the Bonferroni post-hoc tests for the intervention group, comparing changes in parental warmth and family stress across the three time points.

Table 3

Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test for Parental Warmth and Family Stress

Comparison	Mean Difference	SE	p
Parental Warmth			
Pre-Intervention vs Post-Intervention	-14.91	1.32	< .001
Pre-Intervention vs Follow-Up	-12.22	1.37	< .001
Post-Intervention vs Follow-Up	2.69	1.08	.058
Family Stress			
Pre-Intervention vs Post-Intervention	14.22	1.17	< .001
Pre-Intervention vs Follow-Up	12.44	1.23	< .001
Post-Intervention vs Follow-Up	-1.78	0.93	.231

The Bonferroni post-hoc tests for parental warmth revealed significant differences between pre-intervention and post-intervention (mean difference = -14.91, SE = 1.32, $p < .001$) and between pre-intervention and follow-up (mean difference = -12.22, SE = 1.37, $p < .001$). The difference between post-intervention and follow-up approached significance but was not statistically significant (mean difference = 2.69, SE = 1.08, $p = .058$).

For family stress, significant differences were found between pre-intervention and post-intervention (mean difference = 14.22, SE = 1.17, $p < .001$) and between pre-intervention and follow-up (mean difference = 12.44, SE = 1.23, $p < .001$). The difference between post-intervention and follow-up was not statistically significant (mean difference = -1.78, SE = 0.93, $p = .231$).

These post-hoc results confirm that the Family Empowerment Workshop had a significant and sustained impact on increasing parental warmth and reducing family stress, with most of the improvements maintained at the four-month follow-up.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The current study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Family Empowerment Workshop in enhancing parental warmth and reducing family stress. The results of this randomized controlled trial demonstrated significant improvements in both parental warmth and family stress levels among participants in the intervention group compared to the control group. These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the critical role of structured interventions in promoting positive parenting practices and mitigating family stress (Chung et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018).

The significant increase in parental warmth observed in the intervention group aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of parental warmth for child

development. For instance, Chung et al. (2019) found that parental involvement and warmth are crucial for adolescents' academic achievement and overall well-being (Chung et al., 2019). The structured sessions of the Family Empowerment Workshop, which focused on enhancing emotional communication, active listening, and positive reinforcement, likely contributed to the observed improvements. These findings are supported by Xu and Zheng (2022), who noted that interventions targeting daily family stress processes could effectively enhance parental warmth (Xu & Zheng, 2022).

Additionally, the involvement of both mothers and fathers in the workshop likely played a role in these positive outcomes. Research by Sandler et al. (2008) suggests that the combined warmth from both parents can have a cumulative positive effect on children's mental health. By engaging both parents, the workshop ensured a holistic approach to fostering a nurturing family environment, thereby maximizing the potential benefits for children (Sandler et al., 2008).

The reduction in family stress among participants in the intervention group is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of family systems theory and ecological systems theory, which highlight the interconnectedness of family members and the impact of broader environmental factors on family dynamics (Lee et al., 2018; Vuorenmaa et al., 2015). The stress management techniques taught in the workshop, such as relaxation exercises, time management, and problem-solving strategies, likely equipped parents with practical tools to handle daily stressors more effectively.

Davis et al. (2020) underscore the role of economic stress in exacerbating family stress and its negative impact on parental warmth and child outcomes (Davis et al., 2020). By providing parents with skills to manage stress, the Family Empowerment Workshop may have helped mitigate the adverse effects of economic and other external stressors.

This aligns with the findings of Xu and Zheng (2022), who demonstrated that effective stress management could lead to better parental warmth and reduced adolescent adjustment problems (Xu & Zheng, 2022).

The four-month follow-up data revealed that the improvements in parental warmth and reductions in family stress were sustained, indicating the long-term efficacy of the intervention. This sustainability is crucial, as it suggests that the skills and strategies learned during the workshop were effectively integrated into participants' daily lives. Schulz et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of long-term follow-up in assessing the true impact of parenting interventions (Schulz et al., 2023). The sustained effects observed in this study contribute to the existing evidence supporting the long-term benefits of comprehensive parenting programs.

The inclusion of both mothers and fathers in the intervention provided insights into potential gender differences in response to the workshop. While both mothers and fathers showed improvements, previous research suggests that fathers may respond differently to interventions aimed at enhancing parental warmth and reducing stress. Lee et al. (2018) found that fathers' parenting stress was significantly associated with child behavior problems, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions that address fathers' unique experiences and challenges (Lee et al., 2018).

Li (2021) explored how Chinese fathers express love and warmth, highlighting cultural variations in parenting practices. The diverse cultural backgrounds of the participants in this study may have influenced how parental warmth was expressed and perceived. Future research should further investigate these cultural and gender-specific dynamics to tailor interventions more effectively (Li, 2021).

The findings of this study have several practical implications. First, the success of the Family Empowerment Workshop underscores the importance of incorporating comprehensive, skills-based training into parenting programs. By focusing on both enhancing parental warmth and managing family stress, the workshop addressed the interconnected nature of these factors, leading to more holistic improvements in family dynamics.

Second, the inclusion of both parents in the intervention highlights the need for programs that engage both mothers and fathers. As noted by Sandler et al. (2008), the combined influence of both parents is critical for children's well-being. Parenting programs should therefore strive to involve both parents to maximize their impact.

Third, the sustained effects observed in this study suggest that follow-up support may be beneficial in reinforcing the skills and strategies learned during the intervention. Regular check-ins or booster sessions could help maintain the positive changes and address any emerging challenges.

Despite the positive findings, this study has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. The sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future studies should aim to include larger and more diverse samples to validate these findings across different populations.

Additionally, the study relied on self-reported measures of parental warmth and family stress, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Including objective measures or third-party observations could provide a more comprehensive assessment of the intervention's impact.

The study also did not account for the potential influence of external factors, such as changes in economic conditions or social support networks, which could have affected the results. Longitudinal studies that track these factors over time would provide a more nuanced understanding of the intervention's effects.

Future research should also explore the specific mechanisms through which the Family Empowerment Workshop exerts its effects. Understanding the pathways through which parental warmth and stress are improved can help refine the intervention and enhance its efficacy.

In conclusion, the Family Empowerment Workshop proved to be an effective intervention for enhancing parental warmth and reducing family stress. The significant improvements observed in the intervention group, coupled with the sustained effects over time, underscore the potential of comprehensive, skills-based parenting programs. By addressing both parental warmth and family stress, the workshop provided a holistic approach to improving family dynamics, benefiting both parents and children.

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the importance of parental warmth and effective stress management in promoting healthy child and adolescent development. They also highlight the need for interventions that engage both parents and provide long-term support. Future research should build on these findings to further refine and expand parenting programs, ensuring that they meet the diverse needs of families and promote positive outcomes across different contexts.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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