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Evaluation of Educational and Practical Workshops on Developing Positive Parenting

“Families in the Centrifuge of Modern Times”

Evalvacija izobraževalnih in praktičnih delavnic

na temo razvijanja pozitivnega starševstva

„Družine v centrifugi sodobnega časa“

Abstract: In this paper, we present a survey that took place in January 2023, with 68 participants, of which 62 were women and 6 were men, who in 2022 attended educational and practical workshops on the topic of developing positive parenting. The name of the workshop was “Families in the Centrifuge of Modern Times,” and it was organized by the University of Adult Education Celje. The aim was to find out which parents attended the workshops, where they learned about them, what are the reasons for their participation and what is their opinion on the usefulness of and satisfaction with the workshops. The results of the survey showed that the participants are mostly women in the age group of 41–50 years; they are mostly university-educated, married, and mostly found out about the workshops online or through social networks. All participants thought that the workshops were useful and that they gained new knowledge. They believed that the professional content was presented understandably and that the workshops improved their lives in general.

Keywords: workshops, positive parenting, parents, families, evaluation

Povzetek: Prestavljamo raziskavo, ki je potekala januarja 2023. Vanjo je bilo vključenih 68 udeležencev, od tega 62 žensk in 6 moških, ki so v letu 2022 obiskovali izobraževalne in praktične delavnice na temo razvijanja pozitivnega starševstva z naslovom »Družine v centrifugi sodobnega časa« v organizaciji Ljudske univerze Celje. Namen je bilo ugotoviti, kateri starši obiskujejo delavnice, kje so zanje izvedeli, kakšni so razlogi za vključitev, in pridobiti njihovo mnenje o koristnosti in zadovoljstvu z delavnicami. Rezultati raziskave so pokazali, da so udeleženske večinoma stare od 41–50 let; udeleženci so večinoma univerzitetno izobraženi, poročeni in so za delavnice večinoma izvedeli na spletu oz. preko družbenih omrežij. Vsi udeleženci ocenjujejo, da so bile delavnice koristne in da so z njimi pridobili nova znanja. Menijo, da je bila strokovna vsebina podana na razumljiv način in da delavnice izboljšujejo življenje na splošno.

Ključne besede: delavnice, starši, pozitivno starševstvo, družine, evalvacija

1. Introduction

Parenting is wonderful and fulfilling, but it can also be tiresome and exhausting. The parents feel everything that a child experiences while growing up, pleasant things as well as unpleasant. They carry their children's burdens and hardships, which can be a trigger for feelings that the parents themselves experienced as children. In this case, they are especially invited to stay connected with the child and help calm her or his distress, which is extremely difficult if they lack self-awareness and the ability to self-calm. The easiest way to do this is to remember their childhood and adolescence and ask themselves what kind of response they would have wanted from their parents in similar situations at that time (Jerebic and Jerebic 2017, 63). They cannot change their childhood experiences, but by being aware of the past and their own experience, they can change their reactions and family roles (Poljak Lukek 2017, 12). In addition to the role of parent, they are also in the role of a spouse, and many family therapies continue as intimate couple therapy because they can contribute the most to solving the child's problems when they calm down and connect as spouses and parents (Jerebic and Jerebic 2017, 63). However, this is much more difficult when the bond between the spouses is so weak that this leads to divorce. At that time, some families face challenging life trials. Parents who themselves experienced their parents' divorce as children find themselves in a similar situation when they have to re-live all those feelings again. Parents who do not have this experience have to go through the divorce process after many disappointments and are thrown into the unknown. Some parents enter into relationships with other divorced parents and their children, facing the reorganization of the family and the question of how they will cope (Ganc 2015, 12). Various social factors are an additional source of stress, so understanding the development and the needs of the family system is important not only for professionals but for every individual (Poljak Lukek 2017, 16). Family-related factors are one of the major groups of risk factors and protective factors in the mental health of children and adolescents (Jeriček Klanšček et al. 2018, 22). To improve the quality of family life, family support programs have been created, which are mainly focused on preventive activities (Rajšp 2018, 27). They are partially or fully financed based on tenders for a maximum of five years. Based on public tenders, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities co-finances eleven content providers of family centres (31). Family centres are a place for multi-generational gatherings, a place for quality improvement in strengthening the social roles of individuals, for support in facilitating the coordination of family and professional life, and a place for the exchange of good practices and positive experiences. For the good development of preventive programs, interdisciplinary and intersectoral cooperation (Program for Children 2020–2025, 19) and monitoring of the effectiveness of program implementation are necessary.

2. Educational and Practical Workshops for Developing Positive Parenting at the Family Centre of the University for Adult Education Celje

“Families in the centrifuge of modern times” is one of the co-financed programs of the family centres in the years 2021–2025, implemented by the University of Adult Education Celje. Three programs put out to tender are available free of charge for participants: 1. holiday activities for children with organized workshops for children; 2. counselling to improve emotional regulation, building a positive self-image, learning to solve various problems, etc., and 3. educational and practical workshops that focus on building and developing positive parenting, which of evaluation are we presenting.

In cooperation with local communities, University for Adult Education Celje has been implementing programs to help and support families since 2017. Marriage and family therapy specialists conduct educational and practical workshops for parents. Initially, the workshops were held live at the headquarters of the University for Adult Education Celje, but during the Covid-19 epidemic, they were transferred online and are held live via the Zoom application once a week. They address various topics that we have identified as necessary and desirable in the local environment. Participants can actively participate already in the stage of preparation, by suggesting the topics they want to hear, and participate interactively. The topics are as follows:

- The importance of responsiveness and sensitivity in building and maintaining an authentic relationship with children.
- Different forms of families (separated, blended, single-parent, foster families) and their specific challenges.
- The importance of a quality couple relationship for family life and how to build it.
- Taking care of oneself within the family and intimate couple relationship, balancing professional and family obligations and increased burdens for parents.
- Problems in the family and their resolution (destructive patterns from the primary family and their repetition through generations).

The facilitators conducting workshops are available to answer questions related to the topic. The conducted workshops are audio-recorded and are accessible to the participants even after the conclusion of the program.

The goals of the workshops are:

- Strengthen and enhance parental competences for responsive and sensitive parenting;
- Teach parents appropriate communication styles and ways to express their (emotional) needs;
- Development of techniques and skills for effective problem-solving and conflict resolution.

For the successful and efficient implementation of the family support program, we need insight into the needs of the participants and their feedback on the program's

efficiency. In the following, we present a survey whose purpose was to evaluate educational and practical workshops on the topic of developing positive parenting.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The survey was completed by 68 participants, of which 62 were women (91.2%). The majority of participants (43%) belonged to the age group of 41 to 50 years, and slightly less (34%) to the age group of 31 to 40 years. Most of the participants have a university education, are married, and live in the Savinjska region.

3.2 Measures

We used the research method with a survey questionnaire using an online tool 1ka. The questionnaire consisted of three sets of questions. In the first set, there were five questions about demographic data. The second set contained five questions of mostly open type. These questions were related to the motivation for participation, where they heard about the workshops, how many meetings they attended, whether they were comfortable with the Zoom application, and why, and whether they attended the workshops live or listened to recordings. The third set of questions contained 12 questions related to their satisfaction with the performance and with the person conducting workshops.

3.3 Procedure

The survey was conducted in January 2023 via 1ka and was sent to all participants who attended the workshops in 2022.

4. Results and discussion

Most of the participants found out about the lectures via the Zoom platform online or via social networks (e.g. Facebook, Gmail) (31%) or from a friend/colleague/family member (28%). Twelve percent of the participants report that they learned about the lectures through the University for Adult Education Celje. The majority decided to participate because of the interesting topic (47%) and the desire for personal growth and self-discovery (38%). In addition to the aforementioned reasons, they decided to participate because of the facilitator and her lectures they had attended before (21%) and free online participation (9%).

The majority of participants attended more than 10 meetings (46%), some attended from 6 to 10 (28%), and a few from 2 to 5 (24%). The participants fully agree that the Zoom lectures suited them, with most of them mentioning the time they saved (35%), some also due to living in another place (25%), and simply due to easier logistics and practicality (25%). In doing so, they repeatedly emphasized

that the option of viewing the footage later was very welcome. As many as 47% of the participants followed the lectures live, while 44% also listened to the recordings.

All participants estimate that the lectures were useful and that they gained new knowledge. The topics that appealed to the participants the most were self-relationship, personal growth (29%), intimate couple relationship (28%), and parental relationship (24%). More specifically, the topics of a respectful couple, inherited family traumas, setting boundaries, and expectations and communication with children were mentioned. As many as 93% of the participants report that they have introduced changes after the lectures, especially in intimate couple relationships (38%) and parental relationships (32%). They say that they now react better and more calmly, have better communication and less impulsive reactions, express their needs more clearly, accept themselves and others, are compassionate and tolerant, etc. The rest cited a lack of will and persistence or lack of courage as the reason why they did not introduce changes, some of them had not yet introduced them because of the fast pace of life, and some needed the content of the lectures to settle down a little more. If they want to change, i.e. have a good and resonant relationship, they need to know how to maintain quality communication (Kraner 2022, 229).

On a five-point scale from 1 - very disappointed to 5 - very satisfied, the participants were on average very satisfied with the implementation of the workshops ($M = 4.94$) and with the selected topics ($M = 4.90$). As many as 59% of the participants report that they would recommend the workshops to their friends, and all the rest have already done so. They believe that the workshops are very useful, practical, and interesting, that they enable personal growth and better relationships, that the professional content is given in an understandable way, and that the workshops improve life in general.

The study showed, how important vulnerability is in relationships. Individuals who dared to take risks and expose themselves also gained something for themselves in return.

Only in the presence of tenderness in relationships does the effective transformation of one's perception of oneself, others, and the world, as well as liberation from painful entanglements, occur. Liberation is never achieved by the individual alone, but always in relationship with another who is gentle, and in which is safe enough for the individual to expose their vulnerability (Simonič 2018, 217).

In the following Table 1 presents the average ratings of the facilitator and her lectures on a five-point scale (1 – insufficient, 5 – excellent). The average values in Table 1 indicate a high level of satisfaction with the facilitator, her work, and the contribution of the lectures to personal growth and relationships.

Item	M
Evaluation of the performer	4.97
Assessment of delivery of the content	4.93
Assessment of answering questions	4.88
Evaluation of the practical value of lectures	4.76
Assessment of the contribution of lectures to personality growth	4.84
Assessment of the contribution of lectures to parental relationships	4.87
Assessment of the contribution of lectures to couple relationships	4.84
Assessment of the contribution of lectures to relationships at work	4.60

Table 1: Average scores on a scale Wof 1 to 5 items related to the facilitator and its lectures.

5. Conclusion

A large majority of the participants agree that the lectures were excellent and useful. They agree that the content was given in a professional but easily understandable way, and that the facilitator is highly experienced, which is also reflected by all the examples with which she supported the theoretical content. A proposal was also made for further lectures, namely that the participants could be even more active by using the microphone and not only messages. The participants thanked the facilitator for all her efforts and wished for more such successful workshops. Through their active participation, where they proposed topics and asked questions, the participants improved their interpersonal relationships as well as the quality of their lives. It is advisable to evaluate other contents of family centres co-financed by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in the same way.

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