

Evaluation of Circle of Security Parenting Program for Women with Perinatal Mood Disorders

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Abstract

Postnatal depression is the most prevalent mood disorder associated with childbirth and affects up to 20% of childbearing women. The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the Circle of Security (COS) parenting program for women diagnosed with a perinatal mood disorder. The Circle of Security program is a relationship based early intervention program designed to enhance attachment security between parents and children.

A convenience sample of women admitted to a private mental health hospital was used. The sample consisted of 34 participants from 4 groups conducted over a 9 month period from October 2012 until August 2013. Groups were conducted one morning per week for 8 weeks with an average of 8 women per group. The program included video examples of secure and problematic parent/child interaction, healthy options in caregiving, and animated graphics designed to clarify the principles central to COS.

Participants completed self-report questionnaires pre and post-completion of the eight week program. Various aspects of patient functioning were measured: maternal attributions about infants (Infant Intentionality Questionnaire) – IIQ; how it feels to be a parent and, how it feels when they are with their children (Caregiving Helplessness Questionnaire); and how reactive they perceive themselves to be to young children's negative affect in distressful situations (Coping With Toddlers Negative Emotions Scale - CTNES). Participants also completed an evaluation of the program (COS Parent Feedback Questionnaire).

An analysis of the data revealed a statistically significant reduction in the Caregiving Helplessness Questionnaire subscale of 'Mother Helpless'. The results revealed that mothers felt less helpless about their ability to parent their child/children ($M = 9.35$) after completing the program than before ($M = 12.40$) $t = 2.31, (59), p = .024$. Furthermore, these results are supported by the subjective evaluations of the program – 96% of participants agreed that the program had reduced their stress levels and 100% stated that they now viewed their child's behaviour differently. The results suggest that the Circle of Security parenting program has the potential to assist women who have experienced perinatal mood disorders to improve their relationship and interaction with their children by reducing their sense of helplessness.

Introduction

The Circle of Security program (COS) is an early intervention program that helps parents understand and interact with their child's moods and behaviour. Based on more than 40 years of research it focuses on the relationships that provide children with emotional support. Using a gentle pace the program encourages parents to use a reflective approach to ensure they fully discover, understand and learn how to interact with their children in a more positive and healthy manner.



The COS is a way of thinking about children that enables parents to look beyond the children's immediate behaviour and think about how to meet their relationship needs. The program is designed for parents who wish to help their children manage their emotions more effectively, and to build positive relationships with their children.

Methods

A sample of 34 females aged between 20 – 42 years attending the weekly hospital day-program was used. The program was conducted one morning per week over 8 weeks. Data from 4 groups were used. Participants completed three self-report questionnaires pre- and post-program.

The *Infant Intentionality Questionnaire* is a brief questionnaire that measures maternal attributions about infants.

The *Caregiving Helplessness Questionnaire* asks parents to rate how it feels to be a parent and, more specifically, how it feels when they are with their children.

The *Coping with Toddlers' Negative Emotion Scale (CTNES)* measures the degree to which parents perceive themselves as reactive to young children's negative affect in distressful situations.

The *COS Parent Feedback Questionnaire* provides feedback and comments from the participants which aid in the evaluation and improvement of the program.

Acknowledgements



Originators of Circle of Security

Kent Hoffman, Glen Cooper & Bert Powell

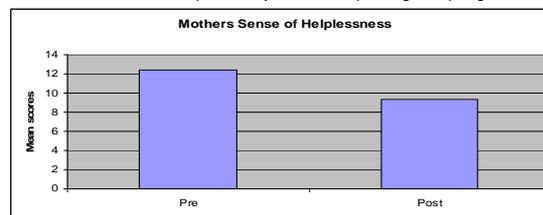
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- Circle of Security International

Results & Evaluation

An analysis of the data revealed that participants' felt less helpless about their ability to parent their child/ren after attending the Circle of Security Parenting program.

In addition, 96% of the mothers had reduced stress levels and 100% viewed their child's behaviour more positively after completing the program.



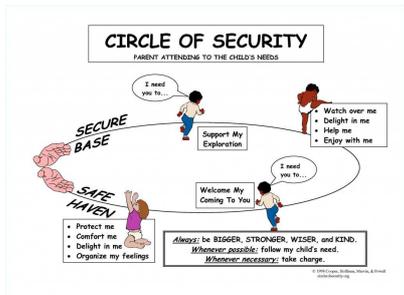
The sample used had all attended a Cognitive Behaviour Therapy program for women with postnatal depression and a Triple P Parenting Program prior to completing the COS Parenting Program – as such, a shift in their attitude and understanding of parenting had already occurred prior to attending the COS program. Therefore, it is suggested that a sample from the general population may show greater improvement in their relationship and interaction with their children.

Conclusion

The results suggest that the Circle of Security Parenting program has the potential to assist women who have experienced perinatal mood disorders, to improve their relationship and interaction with their children by reducing their sense of helplessness and stress levels.

References

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Circle of Security is suitable for families in which children are easily distressed and unsettled, where the parent is experiencing anxiety about the relationship or where families are concerned about their child's behaviour.

