

The CorStone Family Resilience Program: Developing Optimism and Social Support for Decreased Parenting Stress

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Background

For young children in low-income, immigrant communities such as the canal area of San Rafael, CA, where this study was conducted, many risks are present that threaten normal, healthy development; particularly poor parental education and parenting practices (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; McLeod & Shanahan, 1993). A number of interventions to improve parenting in such high-risk settings have been developed; however, many have focused primarily on didactic knowledge-transfer, while sidelining critical social-emotional learning outcomes.

CorStone's **Family Resilience Program (FRP)** is an intervention that combines didactic training with social-emotional skill-building. It concentrates on increasing parenting knowledge, optimism, and social support in a positive learning, peer-support group format, and is geared towards a low-income, Spanish-speaking population.

Intervention and Participants

Participants: Latino families in San Rafael, CA

- Low-income, immigrant families, Spanish as first language; 97% born in Latin America (52% Mexican, 45% Guatemalan)
- At least one child under 5; average age of children: 6.6 years
- 76% women, 24% men
- Three groups of participants:
 - Current parents in CorStone's FRP, Spring 2013 (n = 37)
 - Past participants from Spring 2012 (n = 15), accessed at 6-months post-intervention
 - Parents who had not participated in the FRP, as a control group during the 6-month follow-up (n = 18; no significant differences between control and follow-up groups in gender or country of origin)

Intervention: CorStone's Family Resilience Program (FRP)

- Conducted in Spanish in a peer support group format
- Facilitated by Latina community advocates from local schools
- Combines didactic training in parenting skills (based on the 'Abriendo Puertas' curriculum from Families in Schools) with time for open sharing in a support group format (based on CorStone's 'Attitudinal Healing' approach)



Figure 1. Participants in CorStone's Family Resilience Program and their children before a group session.

Study Aims and Measures

Study Aims:

1. To examine relationships among:
 - parenting knowledge
 - optimism/pessimism
 - parenting stress
 - social support
 in low income, Latino immigrant parents, San Rafael, CA
2. To investigate the impact of CorStone's Family Resilience Program (FRP) from pre- to post-intervention
3. To explore impact sustainability, 6-months post-intervention

Measures: Participants completed self-report questionnaires, with validated Spanish translations of the following tools:

Parenting Knowledge: A 6-item test of knowledge

Parenting Stress: Parental Stress Scale (PSS), $\alpha = 0.85$

(Translation from Ornoz, 2007; scale from Berry & Jones, 1995)

Optimism/Pessimism: Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R);

Optimism subscale, $\alpha = 0.55$; Pessimism subscale, $\alpha = 0.77$

(Translation from Perczek, Carver, Price, & Pozo-Kaderman, 2000; scale from Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994)

Social Support: Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), $\alpha = 0.91$

(Translation from Arechabala Mantuliz & Miranda Castillo, 2002, scale from Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988)

Time points: Participants completed measures at three time points:

- T1: immediately before participation (baseline)
- T2: immediately following participation (endline)
- T3: 6-month post intervention (6-month follow-up)

Hypotheses:

- Parenting knowledge, optimism, and social support will positively correlate with one another, and parenting stress will negatively correlate with knowledge, optimism and support
- The FRP will positively impact knowledge, optimism, social support and stress, measured directly following the intervention
- Impact will be sustained at 6-month follow-up compared to a control group

Table 1. Correlations between measures at baseline. *n*'s range from 33 to 37. Note: * = $p \leq 0.05$, ** = $p \leq 0.01$, *** = $p \leq .001$.

	1	2	3	4
1 Parenting Knowledge				
2 Parenting stress (PSS)	-0.38*			
3 Optimism (subscale of LOT-R)	-0.05	-0.1		
4 Pessimism (subscale of LOT-R)	-0.41**	0.52***	0.05	
5 Overall social support (MSPSS)	0.31	-0.35*	0.19	0.2

Analysis and Results

Analysis:

- Correlations among variables at baseline
- Comparisons (t-tests) for outcomes from baseline to endline
- Comparisons (t-tests) for outcomes at 6-month follow-up vs. peer-group controls

Correlations among variables: at baseline

Table 1 presents correlations between measures at T1. Correlations were generally in the directions expected.

- Parenting knowledge and social support were positively correlated
- Parenting stress was negatively correlated with knowledge, optimism and social support
- Pessimism was negatively correlated with parenting knowledge and positively correlated with pessimism

Differences in outcomes: baseline to endline

Figure 2 presents effect sizes (Cohen's d) observed for t-tests from baseline to endline (generally moderate to large).

- Significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were observed in all outcome variables with the exception of optimism
- Optimism was higher at endline, though results were not significant

Differences in outcomes: 6-month follow-up vs. control

- Parenting knowledge and parenting satisfaction (a subscale of PSS) were significantly higher at 6-month follow-up than among controls, all $ps < .05$
- Social support was higher in the follow-up group and pessimism and parenting stress were lower, though results were not significant

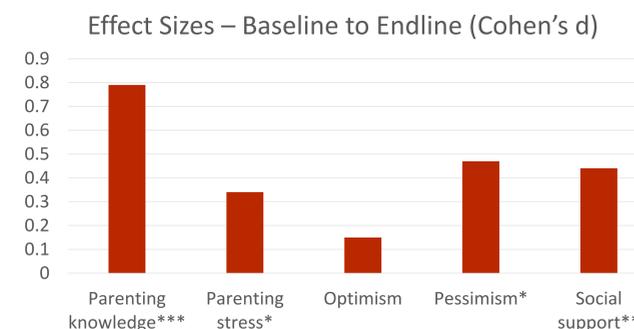


Figure 2. Baseline to endline effect sizes of CorStone's Family Resilience Program. Note: * = $p \leq 0.05$, ** = $p \leq 0.01$, *** = $p \leq 0.001$.

About CorStone and the Family Resilience Program:

CorStone develops and implements resilience-based interventions and research initiatives to improve the health, education, and self-sufficiency of marginalized adults and youth around the world. Nearly 250 low-income families have attended CorStone's Family Resilience Program, and thousands of others have attended other CorStone programs in the US and internationally.

Discussion

- **This low-income, Latino immigrant sample showed the expected relationships among parenting knowledge, pessimism, stress, and social support.**

This finding is critical, particularly as researchers have questioned whether western definitions of risk/protective factors, particularly in relation to stress, are useful in non-western populations (e.g., Lightsey Jr. & Christopher, 1997). Our findings suggest that pessimism and social support are highly relevant to parenting knowledge and stress levels among low-income, Latino immigrant parents of young children.

- **Differences from baseline to endline suggest that CorStone's FRP impacts knowledge, pessimism, support, and stress.**

In particular, large effect sizes were observed for parenting knowledge and moderate to large effect sizes were observed for pessimism, social support and parenting stress.

- **Differences in outcomes were still observed after 6 months.**

All outcomes were still improved at 6-month follow-up compared to controls, though not all differences were significant (potentially due in part to the small sample size).

These findings suggest that the FRP's design of targeting all four of these outcome areas holistically may be effective in this population. Further research should examine the FRP's effect with a larger n and a control group during the intervention.

Conclusions and Implications

Interventions that target not only knowledge but also social-emotional outcomes such as optimism/pessimism and social support have the potential to impact parenting skills and stress levels in high-risk populations.

As these findings suggest, there are significant links among social-emotional outcomes and more traditionally-desired outcomes of improved knowledge levels in such populations. Thus, in developing effective interventions to reduce the burden of poor parenting among low-income and immigrant populations throughout the United States, integrating positive social-emotional learning strategies into more traditional, didactic programs may be beneficial.

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