INCREASING FATHER PARTICIPATION IN PARENT EDUCATION IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine what can be done to increase father participation in parent education in Prince Edward Island. Relevant literature consistently shows both the importance of father participation in parent education, and the low attendance by fathers in parent education. This project sought to examine what barriers might be limiting father participation, and to explore what potential facilitators might increase father involvement. In order to investigate these questions in a local context, three parenting seminars were held in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island with the aim of eliminating barriers and using facilitators to increase father involvement. The aim was to see if it was possible to increase father turnout by using methods informed by prior research. At the seminars, male participants were also invited to take part in a phone interview to discuss their experience in coming to the sessions. A total of four phone interviews were held with fathers who attended the sessions. This project found that it is possible to increase the proportion of men who attend parent education seminars. Interviews also indicated that while shared parenting is a value that all four interviewees held, it is possible that gender roles may continue to hold men back from participating in parent education.
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Parents play significant roles in their children’s lives. Parents have the ability to use positive parenting skills to enhance children’s wellbeing (Sanders, 1999; Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, Day, 2014), as well as provide nurturing environments that allow children to grow in ways that foster their social and psychological wellbeing. These positive parenting techniques can also be used to mitigate environmental challenges, such as the impacts of poverty and living in low-income neighbourhoods (Sanders et al., 2014). While positive parenting can improve children’s lives, parents also have the ability to negatively impact their children’s lives with the use of harsh parenting practices (Ryan, O’Farrelly, & Ramchandani, 2017; Fletcher, Freeman, & Matthey, 2011; Sanders, 1999). When parents lack warmth and responsiveness, or make use of harsh or inconsistent punishments, children can develop a number of adverse outcomes including substance abuse, mental health complications, and participation in criminal activity (Sanders, 1999). Many people do not have the chance to receive training in parenting, and often end up using only their knowledge of being parented themselves as a guide for parenting their own children (Sanders, 1999). Though parents’ use of either positive or harsh parenting practices can impact children, it is important to recognize that parenting practices are malleable and can be shifted (Ryan et al., 2017).

One way parents can shift their practices is by taking part in parenting programs. Parenting programs are excellent resources for parents of all backgrounds who wish to learn what practices are best when it comes to parenting positively. Parenting programs have the ability to increase positive parenting practices and reduce negative parenting practices (Knerr, Gardner, & Cluver, 2014). Parenting programs also have the ability to reduce disagreements between parents stemming from differences in parenting (Frank, Keown, & Sanders, 2015). Parenting programs are widely available and are frequently offered at little or no cost (Tully et
Parenting programs often recognize that parenting is a difficult job that does not come with training and offer a place where parents can better understand and perform their role as a parent (Sanders, 1999).

**Triple P Positive Parenting Program**

While many parenting programs exist, one program in particular is supported by decades of empirical research. The Triple P Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) combines a variety of clinical methods to assist parents in learning and maintaining positive parenting practices (Sanders, 2008). Triple P seeks to prevent the occurrence of social, behavioural and emotional difficulties in children by increasing parents’ knowledge and skills (Sanders, 1999). It is based in social learning theory and carries three main goals in improving child and parent wellbeing. The first goal is to “enhance the knowledge, skills, confidence, self-sufficiency, and resourcefulness of parents of preadolescent children” (Sanders, 1999, p. 72). The second goal seeks to create environments for children that promote their safety and security, as well as nurture their curiosity and engagement with the world around them. The final goal of Triple P is to use positive parenting to increase children’s “social, emotional, language, intellectual, and behavioral competencies” (Sanders, 1999, p. 72). These three goals provide the basis for Triple P’s programming.

Triple P’s positive perspective on parenting may not be unique in parenting programs, but there are several aspects of Triple P that set it apart from other parent education programs. One way Triple P is unique is its use of the principle of ‘minimal sufficiency’ which seeks to address familial concerns while using the appropriate level of resources. One way Triple P endeavors to be minimally sufficient is through the use of a menu-like array of options parents can use to access parent education. This menu includes varying levels of intensity, involvement, and
programming format to best suit the needs of families (Sanders, 2003). Program formats include “individual face-to-face sessions with a practitioner (standard format), group, self-directed… and online” (Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, & Day, 2014, p. 340). The variety of program formats allows parents a level of autonomy in choosing what program will best suit their needs. In addition to the format of the program, there are five varying levels of intensity of Triple P, which give parents options in choosing what will best suit the needs of their families. Interventions are provided for either parents of children aged 0-12, or parents of adolescents.

The first level of Triple P is Universal Triple P and is population based. This level attempts to destigmatize parenting programs, increase awareness of these programs, and create hope and optimism that there are solutions for parents who are struggling. This level uses a wide array of media including the Internet, videos, posters, and brochures in order to communicate its messages (Sanders, Turner, & MacWilliam, 2016). One of the main goals of this intervention level is to promote the prevention of parenting difficulties by increasing awareness and usage of parenting programs (Sanders, 1999).

The second level of Triple P is called Selective Triple P and takes a more specific approach than Level One. It includes three 90-minute Selected Seminars for parents on topics that stress the importance of positive parenting. The seminars are titled “The Power of Positive Parenting; Raising Confident and Competent Children; and Raising Resilient Children” (Wells, Sarkadi, & Salari, 2015, p. 276). Level Two also aims to prevent difficulties that may arise in the absence of intervention through the usage of brief twenty-minute sessions addressing parents’ concerns. These sessions also include tip-sheets which provide information on preventing problem behaviours.
The third level of Triple P, named Primary Care Triple P, focuses on families with more specific, but mild concerns about their children. Level Three includes four, twenty-minute sessions that discuss skill building, tip sheets, and a focus on generalizing skills to other behaviours or children (Sanders, 1999). In addition, Level Three also includes two-hour discussion groups of 10-12 parents who are experiencing similar difficulties with a parenting issue (“Triple P”).

The fourth level of Triple P provides an array of options for parents whose children are experiencing more severe behaviour problems: Standard Triple P, Group Triple P, Self-Directed Triple P, and Triple P Online. Through individual sessions, group sessions, or self-directed sessions, parents can focus on preventing the progression of their children’s negative behaviours. This level is designed for parents who have distinct difficulties with parenting and have children whose behaviour problems occur in a variety of situations (Sanders, 1999).

The fifth and final level of Triple P includes Enhanced Triple P, Pathways Triple P, Family Transitions Triple P, and Group Lifestyle Triple P. Enhanced Triple P focuses on families who may have already participated in an earlier level of intervention, but due to additional difficulties, require further assistance. This intervention includes individual sessions that focus on parental communication, emotional regulation, and coping skills (Sanders et al., 2016). These sessions are conducted through home-visits and are for parents and children who may have difficulties with partner support, parental adjustment, and other high-risk circumstances (Sanders, 1999). Pathways Triple P is an additional level that is for parents who may be at risk of abusing their child either emotionally or physically. This intervention includes between two and five 60-90 minute sessions, with a focus on managing emotions and building positive parenting skills (“Pathways,” 2017). An additional intervention in Level Five is Family
Transitions Triple P, which is a program for families who are struggling with separation and divorce ("Family Transitions," 2017). The final intervention included in Level Five is Group Lifestyle Triple P, which seeks to help parents of obese children “develop effective strategies for managing their child’s weight” through a variety of gradual lifestyle changes ("Group Lifestyle," 2017).

**Evidence base.**

Triple P has amassed a wide evidence base in the decades since its conception (Fletcher et al., 2011). A recent meta-analysis of 101 studies of Triple P’s effectiveness found that Triple P had an “overall significant medium effect size” for child behavioural, social, and emotional outcomes, as well as medium effect sizes for parenting practices, satisfaction, and efficacy (Sanders et al., 2014, p.32). The impacts of Triple P have been found to be maintained in both the short term and the long term. This meta-analysis also found that Triple P was effective for families with children who do and who do not have developmental impairments, and that all formats of Triple P led to positive parent and child outcomes (Sanders et al., 2014).

**Attendance and Father Participation**

While parenting programs like Triple P have the ability to create positive effects in children’s and parents’ lives, parenting programs are unequally attended by mothers and fathers. Those who attend parenting programs are overwhelmingly female (Wells et al., 2015), with studies finding that men make up roughly 15% of participants in parenting programs (Budd & O’Brien, 1982; Lindsay, Strand, & David, 2011; Tully et al., 2017; Fletcher, Freeman, & Matthey, 2011). This number has been relatively constant over time from Budd & O’Brien’s finding in 1982 to Tully et al.’s finding in 2017. Despite the progress that has been made in
gender equality over the previous thirty-five years, father participation in parenting programs has remains relatively stable.

The low number of fathers attending parenting programs is problematic for several reasons. Fathers play an important role in their children’s development (Meyers, 1993; Fletcher et al., 2011). Fathers have the potential to provide a safe base for children to explore from, with securely attached children being better able to problem-solve than children who are not securely attached to their fathers (Meyers, 1993). Moreover, fathers have a unique role to play in increasing their children’s social skills and reducing their problem behaviours (Sanders, Dittman, Keown, Farruggia, & Rose, 2010). In some circumstances, fathers may be more impactful than mothers when it comes to their children’s behavioural difficulties, as fathers are more likely to discipline their children, and their harsh discipline may have more of an effect on their children than maternal discipline (Tiano & McNeil, 2005).

In situations where two parents are raising children together, attendance by both parents to parenting sessions has been found to be effective in both maintaining positive child outcomes and reducing disagreements on parenting between mothers and fathers (Frank, et al., 2015; Salinas et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2015, Fletcher et al., 2011; Lundahl, Tollefson, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2008). Conversely, when only one parent attends a parenting program, outcomes of the program may not last as long (Tiano & McNeil, 2005). Moreover, fathers’ lack of participation in parent education contributes to the unequal division of labour that exists within families. Fathers’ lack of participation suggests that parenting is a role mothers must take on their own, and that it is not a father’s responsibility to parent his children (Sicouri et al., 2018). Taken together, this evidence supports the notion that fathers play a critical role in parenting, and therefore parent training.
Current Barriers to Parental Involvement

To increase father participation in parent training, we should examine what barriers exist to their participation. While some barriers exist for fathers’ participation specifically, there are barriers faced by both men and women that deserve investigation. These shared barriers include work demands, a lack of knowledge of programs, unavailability of childcare, and the belief that parent training is too severe for the situation (Tully et al., 2017; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Meyers, 1993; Balyey, Wallace, & Choudhry 2009; Sicouri et al., 2018). It is important to examine how these barriers prevent both fathers and mothers from attending parent training so that these barriers may be adequately addressed and removed.

Work demands.

One of the most frequently cited issues with parents attending parenting programs is that these programs conflict with their work demands (Tully et al., 2017; Glynn & Dale, 2015). Women’s workplace demands have risen over the years, with the proportion of families with two incomes increasing “from 36% in 1976 to 69% in 2014” (Statistics Canada, 2015). Fathers also face work-related barriers, as 76% of families with at least one child under the age of 16 have fathers who are either the sole income earners for their families or are part of dual-earner families (Statistics Canada, 2015). This means the majority of fathers are working, making it more difficult to dedicate time to being involved in a parenting program. Many parents find it difficult to engage in parent training if it conflicts with their work, and are less likely to attend if they must take time off work (Meyers, 1993). Moreover, many parents work irregular hours which make it challenging to attend meetings even if they are held in the evenings or on weekends (Balyey et al., 2009). For some, their work schedule conflicts with parent training as they must factor in the commute from their workplace to the program (Salinas et al., 2011). For
others, the inflexibility in their job makes it difficult to attend parent training (Meyers, 1993). Work-related barriers are not the only factor, however; even when programs are available outside of working hours, fathers may not be interested in attending. Some fathers may see their role less as a caregiver and more as a provider, meaning they may not want to attend as they believe that working is already fulfilling their role as a parent (Balyey et al., 2009).

**Lack of knowledge of programs.**

One factor that limits parents’ participation in parent training is a general lack of awareness of services that are available to them. For many parents, not knowing much about program availability, cost, effectiveness, or format is a barrier in their participation (Stahlschmidt, Threlfall, Seay, Lewis, & Kohl, 2014; Sicouri et al., 2018; Tully et al, 2018; Frank, Keown, Dittman, & Sanders, 2014). Lack of awareness of programs may be a problem for both men and women but can sometimes impact fathers more than mothers. For instance, men’s lack of awareness has the potential to stem from a lack of advertising directed at fathers (Balyey et al., 2009). Moreover, some fathers who do have knowledge of parenting programs also may have misinformation about these programs, including beliefs that the programs are for mothers or are too expensive to participate in (Stahlschmidt et al., 2013). However, the lack of knowledge of programs does not extend to only fathers, but a general lack of awareness of programs exists among mothers as well as fathers (Lee et al., 2014).

**Childcare.**

One frequently cited reason for not attending parenting programs is the lack of available or affordable childcare (Friars & Mellor, 2009; Salinas, et al., 2011; Sicouri et al., 2018). Indeed, a lack of childcare presents a barrier in parents’ attendance, as the cost or inconvenience of finding a caregiver may outweigh the perceived benefits of being able to attend the program.
This obstacle becomes greater when asking both parents in a two-parent household to attend a session. Many parents might opt to have only one parent attend a session so the other can stay home to take care of the children (Frank et al., 2014). Having childcare available at parenting sessions may be an effective way to increase parent, and especially father, participation in parent training (Tully et al., 2017).

Belief that parent/child behaviour does not require intervention.

In some cases, the largest barrier to attending parent training for parents is the belief that either their parenting or their child’s behaviour does not require intervention (Tully et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2014). Possibly this may indicate that many children or parents do not require intervention or help; however, it may also indicate a lack of understanding of what behaviour constitutes the need of an intervention. In a survey conducted specifically with fathers, Sanders et al. found that only 20% of those who had indicated a child’s emotional or behavioural problem in the past six months had sought professional help, and only 13% had participated in a parenting program (2010). This may indicate that fathers have a misconception about the severity of a problem that is required before seeking help. Some fathers, and parents in general, may believe that their difficulties do not require intervention simply because they see intervention as being a measure too extreme for their situation. In reality, many programs, and Triple P especially, promote the idea that parenting programs are for everyone, and are not restricted only to children with severe emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Barriers for Fathers Specifically

While some barriers in attending parent training exist for both men and women, some barriers are exclusive to fathers. Those include beliefs regarding gender roles in parenting, and the gatekeeping that is conducted by both men and women.
Beliefs regarding gender roles and fatherhood.

One barrier preventing father participation in parent training is the set of gender roles that surround motherhood, fatherhood, and parenthood. Some fathers are reluctant to partake in parent training over the belief that a father is less of a caregiver and more of a provider (Tully et al., 2018). Some fathers also believe that women are more suited to parenting, and that men lack this skill (Sicouri et al., 2018). Moreover, some men also indicate that asking for help or reaching out to engage in parent training may be interpreted as a sign of weakness – something which defies masculine expectations (Sicouri et al., 2018). While these beliefs regarding gender roles and parenthood may be held by fathers themselves, it may also be the beliefs of practitioners that contribute to fathers’ lack of involvement. Practitioners may favour giving information to mothers instead of fathers with the belief that mothers are the ‘real’ caregivers (Balyey et al., 2009). This misconception may lead fathers to feel unincluded in parent training.

Gatekeeping.

One factor that may impact father participation in parent training is whether they have support from their partner or a professional in their participation. This support or lack thereof is termed “gatekeeping” and has been noted by some fathers as a reason they may be less motivated to attend parent training (Tully et al., 2017; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Sicouri et al., 2018; Tully et al., 2018; Cosson & Graham, 2012; Brent et al., 2005). Gatekeeping can be defined as “a collection of beliefs and behaviors that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work” (Brent et al., 2005, p. 362). Therefore, some mothers may decrease the likelihood of their partners attending a program if they express ideas that fathers do not have a place at such events (Sicouri et al., 2018). While gatekeeping may be as intentional as this, it may be more nuanced in that a mother may attend parent training on her own and not think to invite her
partner (Tully et al., 2018). In addition to mothers’ gatekeeping, professionals also have the ability to discourage fathers’ attendance or continuation of a program. Some fathers indicate that when professionals or practitioners speak mostly to the mother, they feel left out and as though they are just a support person for a mother rather than being a primary caregiver to their children (Cosson et al., 2012; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Devault & Gaudet, 2008). Mothers and professionals, whether intentionally or not, should not discourage fathers from attending parent training.

**Variables that Require More Research**

While some variables have a consistent impact on fathers’ participation, others are vaguer in their ability to inhibit or facilitate father involvement. The influences of these various factors are ambiguous, and sometimes contradicting, making them a point of discussion in research on father involvement. While there are many factors whose influences are unclear, there are several reoccurring factors that continue to be points of discussion in research in father participation in parent training. The gender of the group, the gender of the practitioner, and the format of the training are factors that for some are barriers, for others are facilitators, and for others make no difference.

**Group gender.**

When trying to make parent training more accessible for men, some recommend that there be father-only parenting groups, rather than mixed-gender groups. Those who advocate for father-only groups suggest that they could be more comfortable for men to take part in (Fletcher et al., 2011; Frank et al., 2014; Sicouri et al., 2018). Some believe that father-only groups would offer an element of relationship building and trust that may not be present in mixed-gender groups (Sicouri et al., 2018). Moreover, some prefer an all-male format as it would guarantee that mothers would not dominate the conversation, while others believe an all-father format
would allow mothers to stay home with children, allowing them to not have to worry about childcare (Frank et al., 2014).

While some fathers would like to participate in an all-male group, others prefer to attend a program with their partner (Frank et al., 2014; Glynn & Dale, 2015). Some prefer mixed groups, while others indicate the lack of importance of father-only groups. When surveyed on the relevance of program characteristics for enhancing father involvement in parent training, social workers rated father-only groups as being the second least important feature of a program (Glynn & Dale, 2015).

**Practitioner gender.**

When discussing facilitators to men’s participation in parent training, some point to the gender of the facilitator as being an important factor. Some believe that male practitioners could make fathers feel more comfortable in parent training (Fletcher et al., 2011; Sicouri et al., 2018). Others see the gender of the facilitator as being irrelevant to fathers’ participation, so long as the facilitator is competent (Frank et al., 2014; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Frank et al., 2015; Tully et al., 2018). For others, the importance of the gender of the facilitator is ambiguous, and further research is required before drawing a conclusion (Balyey et al., 2009).

**Program format.**

An additional factor that is a barrier for some and a facilitator for others is the format of the program. For some, online parenting programs provide easy access to information that is available at flexible times (Sicouri et al., 2018; Tully et al., 2017). The online format provides a less intense version of a program, making it more appealing to some fathers (Tully et al., 2017). For others, online programs are undesirable, as they feel too similar to being at work (Frank et al., 2014). Others prefer the benefits of a face-to-face program, allowing them to connect with...
others who are in a similar situation and build relationships with other parents (Sicouri et al., 2018). Finally, some indicate the importance of offering a variety of formats to fathers, including both face-to-face programs as well as online programs (Balyey et al., 2009). The best program format for fathers remains unclear.

**Facilitators to Parent Involvement**

While the benefits or detriments of some factors to parental involvement remain unclear, there are several factors that are consistently seen as facilitating male involvement in parent training. However, it is important to note that several of these factors are facilitators for parents in general – their usefulness not being limited to only helping fathers. Factors like timing, location, childcare availability, recruitment, and advertising have impacts on both parents’ ability and interest in participating in parent training.

**Practical factors.**

The first step in increasing parental participation is to remove the practical barriers that many parents face. This would include providing childcare, having sessions at convenient times, and hosting sessions at accessible and convenient locations, (Frank et al., 2014; Sicouri et al., 2018; Tully et al., 2017). Programs should provide sessions in locations that are local, easy to find, and have ample free parking (Sicouri et al., 2018). Workplaces could be one potential location that may be beneficial in increasing parental participation, as hosting sessions in workplaces may reduce the work-life deficit that many struggle with (Meyers, 1993). Additionally, the use of work-based programs also has the ability to specifically increase father engagement as it more easily ties into their perceived role as both caregiver and provider for their family (Fletcher et al., 2011).
In addition to the practical factors of parent training such as location and timing, the use of advertising and recruitment also has the ability to increase parents’ participation. One valuable use of recruitment is through word-of-mouth. Parents, including fathers, describe the importance of hearing about a program from others who have taken it, especially when there is little known about the program to begin with (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Sicouri et al., 2018; Scourfield et al., 2014; Stahlschmidt et al., 2013). Parents also prefer recruitment tactics and advertising that focus on the benefits of the program rather than the downfalls of their parenting skills (Sicouri et al., 2018; Balyey et al., 2009).

While recruitment and advertising are important factors in facilitating parents’ participation, organizational factors such as the evidence base for the program or the credentials of the facilitator can also impact parental involvement (Kohl & Seay, 2015; Tully et al., 2018; Tully et al., 2017, Sicouri et al., 2018; Mytton, Ingram, Mann, & Thomas, 2014; Frank et al., 2014; Glynn & Dale, 2015).

**General aspects of persuasion.**

Research in advertising, persuasion, and influence more broadly can have practical applications for increasing father involvement in parent training. Cialdini (1984) notes that the six factors that impact influence are reciprocity, consistency, social norms, scarcity, perceptions of authority, and the liking of the message deliverer. These principles can be applied to parenting program advertising to increase advertisements’ persuasion abilities. For instance, Cialdini explains consistency as being the desire to match our “actions, statements, and beliefs” (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2002, p. 45). When an indication or promise is made, individuals tend to follow through with their previous statements. If fathers were to promise their attendance to a parenting
program in some manner, it is likely that they will be consistent with this promise and attend a session.

In addition to consistency, people also tend to follow social norms. Cialdini (1984) explains that people “will make fewer mistakes by acting in accord with social evidence than contrary to it” (p. 88). This means that often, when people are unsure what to do, they will look to the actions of others to inform their own behaviour. This indicates that fathers may be more likely to attend a parenting program if many other fathers are doing the same thing. Increasing the perception of male attendance at parent training then has the ability to increase its “social proof,” potentially increasing fathers’ attendance.

An additional predictor of influence is the liking of the message deliverer in advertising. A deliverer who is physically attractive, similar to the message receiver, cooperates with the receiver, and is perceived to like the receiver is the optimal message deliverer (Cialdini, 1984). These four dimensions of liking indicate how well the message deliverer will be able to influence the message receiver. In addition to the likability of the message deliverer, Cialdini explains that those in positions of knowledge or authority are better able to persuade audiences. In father recruitment then, it could be beneficial if the message deliverer was a physically attractive father, who seemed relatable, friendly, knowledgeable, and to be working in the best interests of others.

**Father Specific Facilitators**

Though some facilitators are useful in encouraging participation from both mothers and fathers, there are several steps that can be taken to facilitate specifically fathers’ participation in parent training. These include using father-friendly language in recruitment, advertising, and classes themselves, as well as being sure to represent fathers in advertisements and recruitment images. Additionally, advertising can be focused in father-frequented areas, and programs can be
held in locations that are welcoming of fathers. Moreover, efforts can be made to ensure mothers, fathers, and practitioners understand the importance of father participation, and work together to ensure the facilitation of their participation.

**Language.**

The language used in advertising often involves underlying understandings and assumptions of who belongs in certain places. A number of fathers, mothers, and program practitioners note that using more father-friendly and father-specific language in advertising could attract more fathers to parenting programs (Scourfield et al., 2014; Sicouri et al., 2018; Bayley et al., 2009; Frank et al., 2014). The language used in recruiting, and within programs themselves, plays an important role in making participants feel included and as though they belong. Programs that incorporate fathers into explanations, illustrations, and examples show participants that fathers are included. Language used in advertising should also be positive, with messaging about thriving as a father, or raising competent children. This positive spin has been found to be an effective way to attract fathers to programs by focusing on the benefits of parent training, rather than the deficits of the fathers themselves (Sicouri et al., 2018). Father-friendly and father-positive language has the ability to communicate that it is normal, expected, and acceptable for fathers to be a part of parent training (Frank et al., 2014).

In addition to the language that is used within the programs, the naming of programs can also signal who is welcome to attend. Programs that are gender-neutral or father-specific might indicate to men they are welcomed. Father-targeted program naming can be specific, including explicit references to fathers, dads, fatherhood, and men (Scourfield et al., 2014), or program names can simply be gender neutral, with references to parents, parenting, and raising children. However, some findings indicate that terms typically viewed as “gender neutral” might not be
considered neutral by everyone. Some researchers have found that fathers consider the term “parent” to refer to mothers, meaning a “parenting program” is in actuality, a program for mothers (Balyey et al. 2009; Sicouri et al., 2018). Father-explicit language may be a more effective tool for recruiting fathers to parent training than gender-neutral language (Balyey et al., 2009).

Location.

A practical way to facilitate father participation in parent training may be to increase the placement of advertisements in father-frequented areas (Meyers, 1993; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Balyey et al., 2009). Traditional locations for advertising of parenting programs include schools, medical offices, daycares, and family centres, which are more likely to be frequented by mothers. The placement of advertisements in these mother-frequented locations may impact fathers’ knowledge of programs, inhibiting their ability to participate in parent education (Balyey et al., 2009). Recruitment should aim to take place in father-frequented areas, with advertisements placed in workplaces, pubs, job centres, sports venues, places of worship, and cafés (Meyers, 1993; Glynn & Dale, 2015). An additional gain of advertising in these locations would be the variety of people who frequent these areas, potentially increasing the ability to recruit fathers of diverse racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Balyey et al., 2009).

Images.

Images used in advertisements and at locations for parenting programs also provide a quick, easy way to create a sense of inclusiveness for fathers (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Stahlschmidt et al., 2013; Balyey et al., 2009; Kohl & Seay, 2005). Advertisements should depict fathers with their children, so as to communicate an understanding of the roles fathers play in their children’s lives. These images should also aim to be racially diverse, so as to emphasize the inclusion of a
variety of fathers (Stahlschmidt et al., 2013; Glynn & Dale, 2015). In addition to recruitment, program venues as well as visual portions of programs and sessions, should aim to depict fathers with their children. Posters at program locations, as well as videos and brochures included in parent training sessions, should represent a diversity of fathers so as to promote feelings of inclusion before, during, and after sessions (Balyey et al., 2009; Kohl & Seay, 2005).

Gatekeeping.

The encouragement by a partner or professional to take part in a parenting program can have a significant impact on fathers’ attendance (Tully et al., 2017; Tully et al., 2018; Brent et al., 2005; Salinas et al., 2011; Sanders et al., 2010). Fathers frequently cite their partners’ encouragement as a reason for their participation in parenting programs (Salinas et al., 2011, Sicouri et al., 2018). Without adding father participation to mothers’ lists of responsibilities, it may be beneficial for practitioners to emphasize to mothers the importance of father involvement (Tully et al., 2017; Tully et al., 2018; Brent et al., 2005). If mothers understand the importance of their partners’ involvement, they have the ability to be an effective recruitment tool for father engagement.

Present Study

The present study seeks to discover how father participation in Triple P parenting sessions on Prince Edward Island changes when barriers are removed and facilitators are actively used. This study seeks to address barriers to father participation, including work demands, lack of knowledge of programs, difficulty with childcare, beliefs about gender roles, and discouragement on the behalf of mothers and program practitioners. In addition to removing barriers, this study seeks to facilitate father involvement by implementing a variety of strategies to increase participation. Facilitators include offering sessions at convenient times and in an
accessible location in a facility with a wide range of community uses, using word-of-mouth recruitment, having a reputable practitioner and evidence-based program, using persuasion principles to increase advertising effectiveness, using father-friendly language and images in recruitment, and increasing the encouragement by partners to attend sessions. This study seeks to remove barriers and increase facilitators in order to determine what strategies work best for increasing father participation in parent training.
**Methods**

**Procedure**

This project was approved by the University of Prince Edward Island Research Ethics Board in January 2019. After receiving approval from the Research Ethics Board, we began planning three Triple P seminars for parents of children up to age 12 in Charlottetown, PEI. The organization and advertising of the seminars were specifically designed to increase father participation in parent education. Our goal was to remove barriers and actively promote father involvement.

We used two means of assessing the success of the removal of barriers and use of facilitators. First, the ratio of men and women at these sessions was compared to previous sessions that had been held on PEI. To make this comparison, we emailed practitioners who had recently completed Level 2 Triple P Selected Seminars and inquired about the attendance of men and women at their sessions. Please see appendix A for this request for information.

In addition, we also conducted telephone interviews with some of the men who attended the sessions. The goal of these telephone interviews was to better understand what aspects of the organization and advertisement of the sessions made it easier or more difficult for men to attend. These telephone interviews were set up by handing out an information sheet at each seminar to those who appeared to be men in the audience. The information sheet described the project and provided a space where men could leave their name, email, and phone number if interested in being contacted for an interview. This information sheet containing participants’ contact information was then handed back to the researcher. Please see appendix B for the information sheet. After all three seminars were finished, eight men had given their information to the researcher for contact. These volunteers were contacted through email and given time slots that
could be signed up for if they were still interested in being interviewed. Attached to the email was a consent form containing the same information that had been provided on the initial information sheet, as well as examples of what questions would be asked during the interview. A total of four men responded to the request and were interviewed. Please see appendix C for the email request inviting fathers to be interviewed, and appendix D for the consent form. Interviews took approximately ten minutes each and were conducted by telephone between March 9th, 2019 and March 11th, 2019. During interviews, notes were taken on the researcher’s laptop using Microsoft Word. No identifying information was recorded during the interviews. Each participant was asked if they were interested in having the notes sent to them after the interview. Three of the participants indicated they would like to receive the notes after the interview, but none of these men made any edits to their notes. The notes from these interviews were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. Please see appendix E for interview questions.

Organization and Advertising of Seminars

Addressing barriers.

Work demands.

Previous research has indicated that work demands have an impact on fathers’ ability to participate in parent education (Meyers, 1993). To address this, seminars were held in the evening, so as to accommodate those who work regular hours. Seminars took place on Wednesdays, between 7:00pm and 8:30pm. This time was selected so as to give parents enough time after work to transition through dinner before coming to the sessions. In order to have consistency, all three seminars were scheduled to take place at the same time, on three consecutive Wednesdays. This did mean, however, that seminar times were not able to accommodate the schedules of those who work in the evenings.
**Lack of knowledge of programs.**

In order to address a potential lack of knowledge of programs, we advertised using many forms of media including Facebook, Twitter, posters, radio announcements, online community bulletins, word-of-mouth, and by providing information to local churches, elementary schools, and daycares on the content of the seminars. These advertisements directed parents to the Triple P website, where they were able to learn more about the seminars if interested. Additionally, research indicates that a lack of awareness surrounding program costs is a barrier to parental participation (Stahlschmidt et al., 2013), so all advertisements indicated that sessions were free.

**Childcare.**

Research indicates that availability of childcare is an important factor in determining participation in parent education (Friars & Mellor, 2009; Salinas, et al., 2011; Sicouri et al., 2018). To address this, this project partnered with CHANCES Family Resource Centre in order to provide free, high quality childcare at each seminar. All advertisements stated that childcare would be provided at the seminars.

**Belief that parent/child behaviour does not require intervention.**

Research indicates that sometimes parents do not attend parent education sessions because they believe their behaviour or their child’s behaviour does not require intervention (Tully et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2014). In order to communicate that these seminars were for everyone, and not only those who were experiencing specific difficulties, advertisements used language such as “all dads, moms, and caregivers are welcome” and that the goals of the sessions were to “reduce stress and feel confident as a parent.” The purpose of using this language was to communicate that the sessions were for any interested parent, and not only for those experiencing significant difficulties.
Beliefs regarding gender roles and fatherhood.

Prior research has shown that some fathers are reluctant to partake in parent education due to gendered ideas surrounding children and caregiving (Tully et al., 2018; Sicouri et al., 2018). To address these gendered notions, advertisements specifically used language that stated all “fathers, mothers, and caregivers” were welcome at the seminars. The majority of advertisements also used photos depicting men playing with or caring for their children. This use of language and images was meant to convey that the seminars were a welcoming place to fathers. These advertisements specifically placed “fathers” before “mothers” in their wording so as to draw attention to the fact that men were welcome.

Program format, evidence base, and presenter.

More research is required to learn about which program format is most likely to increase father participation. While some research indicates that online formats are beneficial (Sicouri et al., 2018; Tully et al., 2017), other research indicates that face-to-face programs may work better (Frank et al., 2014). For the purposes of this research, we chose a Level Two Selected Seminar from Triple P, which requires parents to listen to a practitioner lecture for sixty minutes, with time for questions throughout the presentation and after it is finished. This format seemed to achieve both the lower intensity of the online versions, while still providing the in-person benefits of hearing from other parents in similar situations. Moreover, because the sessions were in person, it allowed for the opportunity to count audience members to see what proportion of men were in attendance. Beyond the format of the program, the Level Two Selected Seminar from Triple P was chosen because it provided a program with an ample evidence base (Sanders et al., 2014). Prior research has shown that fathers heavily value a program with a strong evidence base (Kohl & Seay, 2015).
An additional factor that was designed to increase father participation was the choice of presenter. Dr. Philip Smith was chosen as he is an accredited Triple P practitioner with experience in the field of parent education, and research had indicated the importance of sessions being provided by a competent, knowledgeable practitioner (Frank et al., 2014; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Frank et al., 2015; Tully et al., 2018). As well, some research had indicated the importance of sessions having a male presenter (Fletcher et al., 2011; Sicouri et al., 2018); however, this research is still ongoing and therefore did not represent a primary motivation for this choice. Most notices regarding the seminars did not identify Dr. Smith as the presenter.

**Using facilitators.**

**Location.**

Sessions took place at the Murphy’s Pharmacies Community Centre in downtown Charlottetown. This location was chosen in attempt to address the needs of various fathers. It was an easy venue to walk to for those downtown residents coming on foot, and it also provided free parking for those who had vehicles. Additionally, the building itself and the room chosen for the sessions were accessible and had access to washrooms that could accommodate various mobility devices. This location was also chosen as it is a community centre with a gym and bowling alley, giving it a more masculine connotation than a family resource centre or a school. Additionally, the centre did not carry the negative associations some parents may have with locations like schools or churches.

**Advertising.**

In order to increase father attendance at the sessions, a variety of methods were used. One method was to use word-of-mouth recruitment. Although it is difficult to know the extent to which this method was used, parents who came to the first seminar were encouraged to tell their
friends and family about the following sessions. Additionally, social media posts encouraged users to think of any dads, moms, grandparents, or caregivers who might be interested in the sessions and let them know about them. These encouragements could have led attendees or social media users to discuss seminars with their friends and family.

In addition to word-of-mouth recruitment, a range of advertising approaches were used. In designing those advertisements, we also focused on the use of positive instead of negative language in advertisements, which some research has found to be preferred by parents (Sicouri et al., 2018; Balyey et al., 2009). Advertisements promoted “feeling confident as a parent” and “helping children strive for success” as ways to focus on the positive takeaways of the sessions, rather than any problem behaviour that might need to be addressed.

The advertising was also informed by prior research on persuasion techniques. Research indicates that feelings of consistency are important, and that people often seek to match their beliefs, actions, and statements, which can include following through on a promise (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2002). To tap into this process, advertisements encouraged fathers and mothers to sign up for sessions online. The purpose of this was to create the feeling that a promise had been made to attend sessions, increasing the likelihood that parents would feel obligated to follow-through on this promise. Similarly, advertising on Facebook also included the option for parents to indicate that they were “Going” to the event, again with the intention of creating the need to follow-through on this promise. Efforts were also made in advertising to indicate that fathers attending parent sessions was a social norm, as research shows that individuals tend to follow social norms because they provide short-cuts to understanding what actions are socially accepted (Cialdini, 1984). Research also indicates the significance of the deliverer of advertising messages, especially with regard to their likability, their similarity to the message receiver, and
their attractiveness. While we briefly considered having a spokesperson who was a father to help with advertising, the difficulty in finding a suitable candidate for this role outweighed its potential benefits. However, this research was taken into account when deciding who was going to deliver a radio advertisement on CBC radio. It was decided that Dr. Philip Smith should do the promotion, as he would be more relatable and similar to our target audience than I would have been as a young woman.

*Location of advertisements.*

Both the physical and virtual location of advertisements were taken into consideration. Prior research indicated the importance of advertisements being in father-frequented areas (Meyers, 1993; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Balyey et al., 2009). Physical posters for this project were placed on bulletin boards around Charlottetown at Atlantic Superstore, Timothy’s World Café, the Bell Aliant Centre, and Invesco. Inquiries were made to put up posters at Sobeys, GoodLife Fitness, Swiss Chalet, and Maid Marion’s diner, but there were no community events boards available, and some of these locations needed corporate approval before posters could be put up. These locations were chosen as they represented a variety of stores, cafés, sports centres, restaurants, and workplaces. In addition to these locations, all churches, daycares, and elementary schools in Charlottetown were emailed information regarding sessions. Email recipients were sent links to posters if they wished to print them out. Some of these organizations responded to the email saying they had printed the information and posted it for parents to see.

Virtual advertisements took place in various online locations. The social media website Facebook was used to create an event that could be shared by multiple pages. The Facebook pages Women’s Network, Man Up PEI, Hockey PEI, PEI Family Violence Prevention Services, Catholic Family Services, and the Murphy’s Community Centre were contacted and asked to
share the event. Catholic Family Services and PEI Family Violence Prevention Services did not respond to the request, and Hockey PEI explained that they could not share any messages from third parties with which they were not partnered. In addition to these community-based pages, this project partnered with the PEI provincial government through Communications and Public Engagement to sponsor advertisements on Facebook. These advertisements were targeted at men living on PEI. The provincial government also shared a total of eleven tweets about the sessions on their Twitter account, which has 14,400 followers. Information on the sessions was also posted on the Premier’s Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention’s E-Bulletin, as well as in the schedule for Family Violence Prevention Week (also held in February), which had the theme of Engaging Men and Boys. Virtual advertisement also took place on online community events boards on the websites of local radio stations Ocean 100 and HOT 105.5. An email was sent to the mayor of Charlottetown to inquire about sending an email about the sessions to city employees, but this email was never responded to. An advertisement for the sessions was also placed on the University of Prince Edward Island Campus Notices. Efforts were also made to promote the sessions using a non-skippable eight second video on YouTube which could be targeted to men living on PEI. However, creating a high-quality video was not possible in the time frame of this project, and pre-made videos advertising Triple P only featured mothers.

Images in Advertisements

The images used in advertising were chosen to portray loving fathers with their children of various ages. These images were selected to communicate that fathers were both welcome and expected to come to sessions. One difficulty that arose in advertising was the fact that we had partnered with the provincial government, and some of the advertisements posted to their Twitter account did not have the father-focus that had been intended. Some of the images they posted
were of children, of a family unit, or of a mother with her child. Please see images used in advertising in appendix F.
Results

**Ratio of Male to Female Attendance**

At the first Triple P seminar on Wednesday February 20\(^{th}\), 2019 there were 17 people in attendance, and 6 (35%) appeared to be men. At the second Triple P seminar on Wednesday February 27\(^{th}\), 2019 there were 26 people in attendance, and 8 (31%) appeared to be men. At the third Triple P seminar on Wednesday March 6\(^{th}\), 2019 there were 15 people in attendance, and 8 (53%) appeared to be men. It should be noted that this does not mean there were a total of 22 different men in attendance across the three sessions, as many of the men and women went to more than one session.

**Attendance Comparison to Previous Prince Edward Island Seminars**

Previous research shows that men make up approximately 15% of participants in parent education (Budd & O’Brian, 1982; Lindsay, Strand, & David, 2011; Tully et al., 2017; Fletcher, Freeman, & Matthey, 2011). While this number may reflect father participation in parent education more broadly, we sought to examine if this ratio was consistent with attendance rates in parent education in Prince Edward Island. To do so, Triple P practitioners across PEI were emailed and asked about the ratios of men and women they had experienced at the Level 2 Selected Seminars they had conducted. A total of three practitioners responded to this request for information. It should be noted that their sessions had not specifically targeted men. One practitioner had given one seminar and estimated there to be about seventy people in attendance with a “mix” of men and women but did not estimate a specific proportion of men. A second practitioner had given three seminars with a total of thirty participants, three of which were men. This equates to a 10% male attendance rate. This practitioner also added that all men had attended with a partner. The third practitioner to respond had given four seminars and estimated
that each session had about ten participants, with about one or two of them being men. This equates to a male attendance rate between 10%-20%. Therefore, estimates of previous Triple P Level Two Selected Seminars indicate a male attendance rate of roughly 10-20%, while this project had a male attendance rate of 31-53%.

**Qualitative Analysis**

Four telephone interviews were held with fathers who had attended one or more of the seminars. A thematic analysis was used to identify themes across interviews. The main themes that emerged from these conversations were the importance of practical factors in seminar organization, expressions of traditional gender roles, and expressions of progressive ideas surrounding gender and parenting.

**Practical factors.**

**Childcare.**

Across the four interviews, there were several key aspects to the organization of the sessions that were important to fathers. All four fathers expressed the importance of offering free childcare at the sessions. One of the fathers explained that while he and his partner chose to leave their children with his parents, he thought it was important to provide childcare for other parents attending the sessions. Similarly, another father explained that he and his wife had chosen to leave their children with his mother as the sessions went too late in the evening to bring their children; however, he expressed that childcare was likely an important factor for other attendees. The two remaining interviewees both made use of the childcare provided at the sessions. One of these two fathers stated that he and his partner likely would have been dissuaded from attending if there had not been any childcare. The other father indicated that
without childcare, only one partner would have been able to attend the session, and it likely would have ended up being his wife.

**Timing.**

In addition to childcare availability, all four interviewees also commented on the timing of the sessions. Each indicated that a session held in the evening, after regular work hours, played a role in facilitating their involvement. Two of the fathers noted that the specific time of 7:00pm provided ample time after work to have dinner and settle the children before leaving again for the session. One of the fathers also emphasized the importance of having the sessions specifically on a Wednesday evening, and explained that other days of the week were either too busy or tiring to go to evening events. Additionally, two of the fathers said that they were able to attend the session as they had enough time to do so. Both indicated that if they had been too busy, they would not have gone to the seminar.

**Session content.**

All four fathers described how the content of the seminars interested them and influenced their decision to attend. Two of the fathers appreciated the positive focus of the content, with one specifically mentioning the importance of helping their child become more confident. Three of the fathers explained that while the information was what they had expected to learn about, that the information was useful and a good refresher.

**Expressions of traditional gender roles.**

**Wife as a gatekeeper.**

All four men interviewed attended the seminars with their partner. During the interviews, each man commented on how the opinion of his wife factored into his decision to come. Two of the men found out about the session because their wife had told them about it. One of these men
said his wife had signed them both up for the session and told him they would be attending. The other man explained that his wife had brought the session up to him after they had had a difficult moment with their child. They discussed it and decided it would be important to go together. The other two fathers had found out about the session themselves and brought it up to their wives. Both wives were supportive of attending the sessions with their husbands. In all four cases then, the wife was supportive of her husband’s participation in parent education.

**Importance of gender roles.**

All four of the interviewees also expressed views that invoked ideas surrounding traditional gender roles. One father explained that he did not feel out of place at the sessions because there were many other fathers in attendance and it did not feel like he was the only man in a room full of women. Another father noted that his wife often attended sessions in the mornings while he was busy at work. He explained that when he has no prior arrangements, he likes to attend sessions with her. In addition to these comments, interviewees were told that the purpose of the project was to explore what factors made it difficult or easy for fathers to attend parenting sessions and were asked if they had any additional comments to make regarding this subject. Two of the men did not have any additional comments, but the other two both expressed ideas that traditional gender roles were likely key in holding many men back from participating in parent education. One father explained that many men likely perceive parenting to be the role of the mother, and therefore would not be interested in participating in parent education. The other father thought that traditional ideas surrounding masculinity often portray asking for help as a sign of weakness. This means that reaching out for help with parenting would likely conflict with traditional views on masculinity. He explained that it would be beneficial if attending parent
education was seen as the duty of all parents regardless of gender, so that the process of reaching out for help with parenting would be normalized and not emasculating.

**Expressions of progressive gender roles.**

**Father initiation in finding a session.**

While two of the fathers had found out about the sessions from their wives, the other two fathers had found out about the sessions on their own. One of these fathers had seen an advertisement for the sessions from the provincial government on Facebook and told his wife they should go together. She was supportive of the idea. The other father indicated that he had a friend working in the mental health system on PEI and asked what resources were available for parents. This friend suggested they see a psychologist, and the psychologist directed them to the seminars. When the interviewee and his wife heard about the sessions from the psychologist, they both were supportive of the idea of going together.

**Indifference to the presence of other men.**

When asked if they had considered if other men would be at the sessions, most of the interviewees said they had not given the idea any thought. One of the men explained that he had not given any thought to if other fathers would be there, and that his motivation for going was to be there with his partner and do his best to do everything with her. Another father explained that while he had not thought about it, he was not surprised to see other fathers at the sessions. He stated that he had been to sessions before and that many fathers do their part in taking care of children. He noted that the session he attended was mostly equal in its representation of men and women. Another father said that he had expected to see other fathers there.

**Being different from own father/parents.**
When asked about their motivations for attending the sessions, two of the interviewees explained they had wanted to go as they wished to be different from the way they had been raised. One of the fathers felt that the way we were raised is not always the best way to be raised, so he was looking for more modern approaches to parenting. Another father expressed that he wanted to go to the session as his own father had not played a prominent role in his life, and he went years during his childhood without seeing his father. He explained that this experience with his own father motivated him to want to have a great relationship with his own children.

**Commitment to shared parenting.**

All four fathers explicitly stated during their interviews the importance of sharing the load of parenting with their partner. One participant explained that parenting is a shared responsibility between both partners, and that the role of the parent should not just be the responsibility of the wife. This father also stated that anything his wife does surrounding parenting, he wants to do with her. The second father explained that he wanted to go to the parent education sessions because it would have been less effective if only his partner had gone. He stressed the importance of collaboration and explained that he and his partner often get different takeaways from sessions, so it was important that they both go and be able to discuss the sessions afterward. The third father also expressed his interest in attending sessions with his partner and explained that most fathers do their part in caring for children. The fourth father explained that he went to the session not as a father, but as a parent. He stated that he puts a lot of effort into parenting his children with his partner and is always looking for ways to improve his skills. He explained that the community would be a better place if there was a more collaborative effort made in raising children and giving all parents, regardless of gender, the skills necessary to care for children.
Discussion

Main Findings

This study made several key findings that may be helpful in directing future research on father participation in parent education. This study found that it is possible to increase the proportion of men who attend parent education sessions in Prince Edward Island. While the attendance numbers themselves were generally small, they were similar to those of previous sessions held in PEI. Compared to these previous Triple P seminars, this study saw a doubling of attendance ratios of men. This indicates that the barriers and facilitators addressed in this study may have played a role in increasing male participation. While it is difficult to discern which factors played the biggest roles, findings from the telephone interviews may identify some of the more pertinent reasons for this increase in proportion of men. These findings include: the ongoing influence of gender roles, the impact of childcare, and insights into the marketing and implementation of parent education.

Ongoing influence of gender roles.

Despite the explicit statements by interviewees on their beliefs in shared parenting, several factors indicate that traditional views on gender roles and parenting may continue to influence male participation in parent education. This can be seen in the fact that while the seminars had been organized and advertised in such a way so as to specifically facilitate male involvement, men continued to make up fewer than half of participants. Moreover, an additional indication of the continued importance of gender roles is the fact that the four men who were interviewed had attended the sessions with their wives. It is important to note that across all three sessions, many women attended the session on their own but only one man (who volunteered for an interview but did not respond to the email request) came alone. This may indicate that women
still play a substantial role in facilitating male attendance in parent education. This idea can be seen in the fact that while the marketing for the sessions had been specifically created for male engagement, two of the four interviewees still only attended sessions because their partner had told them about it.

It is also interesting to note that while the four interviewees expressed that they valued sharing the role of parenting, two of them still stated that gender roles were likely holding many men back from participating in parent education. This may indicate that these fathers perceive themselves to be part of a minority of men who value shared parenting, and that there remain many fathers who follow traditional gendered notions of parenting. Moreover, while the four interviewees had expressed the view that parenting is a shared responsibility, it is not clear what their definition of “sharing” includes. For example, two of the four interviewees indicated the importance of sharing the responsibility of parenting with their partner but explained that it was their partner who had brought up the seminar to them. It may be that these fathers’ conceptualizations of shared parenting extend to the physical and emotional aspects of caring for children but not the emotional labour involved in seeking out help when needed. Women continue to provide the vast majority of the emotional labour in households (Reay, 2005). One of the fathers also indicated he was interested in attending sessions only when he had no other arrangements and was available. This may indicate that his role as a parent is secondary to other aspects of his life. Similarly, one of the interviewees indicated he felt comfortable at the sessions as there were many other men there and he did not feel as though he was the only man in a room full of women. This might imply that he would have felt uncomfortable if he had been the only man in a room full of women, perhaps indicating a discomfort with being associated with something too feminine.
Impact of childcare.

Another important finding from the interviews was that childcare played an important role in facilitating father involvement. The four interviewees commented on the importance of childcare availability, even if they themselves had chosen not to use it. While childcare likely impacts both male and female attendance, it should be noted that it may specifically influence father involvement. This can be seen in one of the comments made by an interviewee, who said that without childcare it likely would have only been his wife attending the session. This comment demonstrates the intersection of gender roles and childcare availability, as it is assumed that when only one parent has the opportunity to partake in parent education, it is more valuable or plausible to have the mother attend. The availability of childcare then, may be influential not only in increasing attendance overall, but in specifically increasing male attendance.

Insights into the marketing and implementation of parent education.

Based on the male attendance at the sessions, and comments made by the fathers who were interviewed, several useful insights into the marketing and implementation of parent education can be taken away from this project. First, all interviewees commented that the timing of the sessions were helpful in facilitating their attendance. Several noted that a weeknight was optimal as it accommodated their work schedules well. Future parent education sessions should be offered primarily in the evening so as to accommodate those who work during the day. Second, social media advertising specifically targeting men may be a useful strategy for increasing father participation, as this is how one of the interviewees found out about the sessions. However, the findings of this study also suggest using mothers as effective recruitment strategies for engaging fathers. Due to the fact that two of the four interviewees found out about the sessions from their wives, and the fact that the vast majority of male attendees were
accompanied by a woman, it is likely a useful strategy to use men’s partners to facilitate their involvement. It is important, however, not to add this responsibility onto mothers’ already full load of duties. Instead, it may be useful to indicate in advertising the benefits of both parents attending sessions when operating in a two-parent household. This may be helpful in encouraging mothers to bring their partners to sessions. Finally, an important insight offered by one of the interviewees would be to normalize attendance to parent education for all caregivers. If parent education is normalized and destigmatized, it might be easier for fathers to attend sessions if they do not view it as an admission of their personal faults of weaknesses, but instead as a normal and natural part of the parenting process. This normalization of parent education would therefore address concerns of the emasculation associated with asking for help, and the stigma associated with being a “bad parent.”

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. One serious limitation of this study was the small attendance numbers of the seminars. While the male attendance ratio in this study did represent an improvement upon previous sessions held in PEI, it is important to note that three audiences between 15-26 people still represents a small sample size. Moreover, there were only four men who were interviewed as part of this project. Although the information provided by the interviewees was insightful and valuable, it only represents the opinions of four people.

Another limitation was the fact that the design of the study made it difficult to determine what factors were the most influential in impacting father attendance rates. The only insights that were obtained from attendees were from the four men who were interviewed. This meant that only those who were able to attend the sessions were able to be interviewed, thus missing out on the perspectives of those who were not able to come. For instance, because the interviewees were
able to attend the sessions, the comments they made on the timing and location being suitable cannot be applied universally, as these factors may have been a barrier to those who did not attend. Similarly, while all four interviewees indicated shared parenting was important to them, it may have been that many men who did not attend do not share this same value. This study is missing out on valuable information by including interviews only with men who were able to attend the seminars.

Another limitation was that interviews were only conducted with men who attended the sessions. It is possible that it would have been helpful to talk to some of the women in attendance and inquire about where the father of their child was. They might have been able to provide important insights into why they attended the session by themselves or why they thought there were not more men present at the sessions. Another strategy that could have been used would have been to do a short survey after the session asking all attendees where they had heard about the session. This would have provided valuable information on what channels are most effective for reaching various audiences.

A practical limitation of this study was the fact that on the night the first session was supposed to take place, there was a snowstorm which ended up cancelling the seminar. All three seminars were moved back one week to accommodate this cancellation. It is possible that this cancellation impacted the attendance rates of the sessions.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research on father participation in parent education in Prince Edward Island should seek to discover whether the findings of this study can be replicated. Future studies should seek to replicate a 30-50% attendance rate of men with larger sample sizes. If these results can be replicated, it may be beneficial to deliver a quasi-experimental study that tests
which factors are the most influential in increasing father participation in parent education. Future research could explore specific variables such as childcare, timing, location, setting, and advertising to uncover what factors play the largest roles in creating gender parity among parent seminar attendees. Future research should specifically look in depth into the benefits and consequences of using various kinds of locations for parenting sessions. For this study, we chose a community centre as the location for the sessions as we thought it represented a more gender-neutral space than a school or family resource centre and would therefore be more attractive to fathers. However, the community centre cost $660.00, which is a significant consideration. Additionally, a school, church, or workplace would be worth researching as they all have natural audiences that can be tapped into for increased numbers. Moreover, it is unclear whether a feminine or masculine connotation is even relevant in increasing father attendance. Together, these factors indicate that further research on venue and session location is required.

Future research should also seek to hear from those who have not been able to attend sessions to hear their perspective on the facilitators and barriers to father involvement. Those who have not been able to attend a session may have a better insight into what barriers are preventing fathers from attending parent education sessions. Future research should also take into account the perspectives of women who have attended sessions without their male partners. They may be able to offer valuable insights into what is preventing men from attending parent education sessions. Another possible future avenue for research could be to more fully explore the implementation of parent education in the workplace. Integrating parent education into the workplace might increase male participation by providing sessions at a convenient time and location, as well as help fathers to more easily associate their role as a provider with their role as a caregiver.
Implications for Father Involvement in Parent Education on Prince Edward Island

This research project has several implications for father involvement in parent education on Prince Edward Island. First, as noted, the majority of fathers who attended sessions were accompanied by a woman. Facilitating male involvement in parent education may best be done through engaging women and encouraging them to bring their partners. Second, providing free childcare at education sessions may be significant for many parents. Providing childcare might have the ability to not only increase attendance overall, but also to specifically increase father attendance at education sessions. However, it should be noted that childcare can be costly, and the liability insurance required to care for children in public settings may outweigh the perceived benefits of providing childcare. Third, Triple P should be more heavily advertised on Prince Edward Island, and should use a variety of advertisement methods in order to reach a diverse array of parents. Outreach and promotion should be through various channels, including informal word-of-mouth and formal advertisements online and in various forms of print and audio/visual media. These advertisements should include men as least as often as women. By advertising parent education more heavily, parent education may become destigmatized, therefore increasing participation by all parents. By normalizing parent education, the perception of needing help is lessened, therefore making it easier for fathers to attend sessions without feeling they have defied masculine expectations.

Conclusion

This research project was able to provide insights into father participation in parent education on Prince Edward Island. It showed that it is possible to increase the proportion of men who attend parent education sessions in PEI. Although small in scale, this study identified and explored a number of measures that collectively showed promise to improve father participation.
Interviews with fathers attending the sessions suggested that they believed in shared parenting. While these beliefs may fall short of full equality, and may not be held by all fathers, they provide a basis to more fully engage fathers in parenting sessions. To build on this, there should be a continued effort to actively engage more men in parent education, so that the responsibilities of parenting can be more equally spread across men and women. Efforts to increase male participation should include engaging mothers, providing childcare at education sessions, providing more diverse and gender-neutral parent education delivery settings, countering traditional gender expectations by emphasizing shared parenting, and working to destigmatize parent education so that reaching out for help becomes normalized.
References


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*Group Lifestyle Triple P [PDF].* (2017). Triple P International Pty Ltd.


Lindsay, G., Strand, S., & Davis, H. (2011). A comparison of the effectiveness of three parenting programmes in improving parenting skills, parent mental-well being and children’s behaviour when implemented on a large scale in community settings in 18 English local


*Pathways Triple P [PDF].* (2017). Triple P International Pty Ltd.


Appendix A

Request to Triple P Practitioners for Information Regarding Previous Male Attendance

Good Afternoon,

My name is Alexandra MacDonald and I am currently a fourth year Psychology Honours student at UPEI conducting research involving the Triple P Positive Parenting Program. I am interested in the participation rates of fathers in Triple P, and specifically their attendance in the 0-12 Selected Seminars.

I am emailing today as I have found from the Triple P website that you are listed as a practitioner of Triple P who has been trained in the 0-12 Selected Seminars. I am wondering if you have held one of these seminars in the past, and if so, if you had any knowledge of the turnout of men or fathers to the seminar?

I certainly do not expect exact numbers or counts of participants, but I am just hoping to get a general sense of how many PEI fathers are attending these programs. If you could provide any help with the following questions, that would be greatly appreciated.

1) How many 0-12 seminars have you provided?
2) Approximately how many participants in total over all of your sessions were there?
3) Approximately what proportion of participants were male or appeared to be male?

Thank you for taking time out of your day to read this email. I appreciate any help you may be able to offer.

Kind regards,

Alex MacDonald
Appendix B

Information and Consent Letter

Information Letter and Consent Form:

Involvement of Male Caregivers in Parent Education

My name is Alex MacDonald and I am a UPEI student who is interested in learning more about what kinds of things make it easier and harder for dads to come to parenting sessions. Lots of times, there are fewer men than women at parenting sessions, and I am wondering why that happens. If you are a male caregiver, such as a father, grandfather, step-father, etc. who might be interested in talking to me over the phone, I would be very interested in learning about what kinds of things made coming to this session easy or difficult.

PLEASE NOTE: You do not have to be a part of my research if you are not interested. My research is not part of the Triple P Seminars, and you are always welcome to come to other sessions even if you are not interested in contacting me. The Triple P session and my research are completely separate.

My Study

This consent form is to invite you to be interviewed as part of my research on dads in parenting sessions. Participation can be ended at any time, and there is no penalty if you choose to leave the study.

Contact Information: My name is Alex MacDonald. I am a UPEI Student and can be contacted by email at alemacdonal7@upei.ca. My supervisor is Dr. Philip Smith, a UPEI Professor who can be contacted by email at smithp@upei.ca.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to see what kinds of things make it easier or harder for dads to come to parenting sessions. Other research has found that it is better for children when parenting sessions have both moms and dads at them, but a lot of the time there are fewer dads than moms at parenting sessions. I am interested in talking to the men who do go to parenting sessions and wondering what else can be done to make it easier for more dads to go to parenting sessions.

Study Design: I am asking all male caregivers who go to the Triple P Parenting sessions if they’d like to be interviewed. This study is open to any male caregiver – it does not matter their child’s age, their relationship to the child, or their relationship to the mother of the child. I am just interested in talking to any male caregiver about what things made it easy or difficult to come to the session. Each participant will talk on the phone with me and be asked about what were some barriers to coming to the session and what were some things that made it easier to come to the session.

The Interview: The interview will be between ten and fifteen minutes in length and ask participants what things made it easier or harder to come to the parenting session. Questions will include how they found out about it (poster, social media, from a partner, from friends, etc.), what they liked about the session, and what could be changed to make it easier for more men to come. After the interview is finished, I will ask participants if they would like to get an email
with all the notes I took of what they said in case they wanted to see my notes or make corrections. They will get the notes within two days of the interview, and will have a week to let me know if there is anything they want to change. If they do not email me within a week, I will assume they are okay with the notes I took. If participants wish to no longer participate in the study, they can withdraw but this must be done within 10 days of completing the interview. I can also email participants a link to the results of the study when it is finished if they are interested. Participants do not have to answer questions if they don’t want to and they can end the interview anytime they want without penalty.

**Privacy:** The information given to me will remain confidential. Names will not be published in the study and answers to questions will not be associated with names. I will not relate any information that could help identify someone. For example, if someone tells me their child or partner’s name I will not write it down. All information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law.

**Risks and Benefits:** There are no known risks or direct benefits to being part of this research. A possible benefit to others is providing information that could help remove barriers to fathers’ participation and help more dads take part in parenting education. There is no compensation for being part of this study.

**Conflict of Interest:** Although not a “conflict” of interest, please note that Dr. Philip Smith, my supervisor, was part of the group that worked to have Triple P brought to PEI and helped organize its implementation here. He is also an accredited Triple P seminars facilitator.

If there are concerns about the ethical conduct of this study, you can contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902) 620-5104 or by email at reb@upei.ca.

If you are interested in being part of my research or have any questions, please leave your contact information below. You may also contact me by email at alemacdonal7@upei.ca.

Thank you for your time.

**Name:**

**Email:**

**Phone:**

**I would like to review the notes after the interview:**

[ ] Yes  [ ] No
Appendix C

Request to Fathers for Telephone Interview

Good morning,

My name is Alex MacDonald and I am emailing today as you had given me your contact information for being part of my research on fathers in parent education. I am very thankful for your participation as it will be very helpful in learning more about dads and Triple P!

If you recall, I had handed out an information sheet that explained I was interested in having a quick 10-15 minute phone call with you to discuss some of the reasons you were interested in going to the session. Attached to this email is a letter that has all the information you need in case you want to know more about the study. This letter also has some examples of the kinds of questions I'd be interested in asking.

If you are interested in doing the phone interview, please let me know the best 2 times for you out of the following listed times. If none of these times work for you, please let me know.

Saturday, March 9th at 2:00pm, 2:30pm, 3:00pm, 3:30pm, 4:00pm, 4:30pm, 5:00pm, 5:30pm.

Sunday, March 10th at 4:00pm, 4:30pm, 5:00pm, 5:30pm, 6:00pm, 6:30pm, 7:00pm, 7:30pm, 8:00pm, 8:30pm.

Monday, March 11th at 10:00am, 10:30am, 11:00am, 11:30am, 5:00pm, 5:30pm, 6:00pm, 6:30pm.

Thank you so much again for your help.

Best,

Alex MacDonald
Appendix D

Consent Form

Consent Form: Involvement of Male Caregivers in Parent Education

This consent form is to invite you to be interviewed as part of my research on dads in parenting sessions. Participation can be ended at any time, and there is no penalty if you choose to leave the study.

Contact Information: My name is Alex MacDonald. I am a UPEI Student and can be contacted by email at alemacdonal7@upei.ca. My supervisor is Dr. Philip Smith, a UPEI Professor who can be contacted by email at smithp@upei.ca.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to see what kinds of things make it easier or harder for dads to come to parenting sessions. Other research has found that it is better for children when parenting sessions have both moms and dads at them, but a lot of the time there are fewer dads than moms at parenting sessions. I am interested in talking to the men who do go to parenting sessions and wondering what else can be done to make it easier for more dads to go to parenting sessions.

Study Design: I am asking all male caregivers who go to the Triple P Parenting sessions if they’d like to be interviewed. This study is open to any male caregiver – it does not matter their child’s age, their relationship to the child, or their relationship to the mother of the child. I am just interested in talking to any male caregiver about what things made it easy or difficult to come to the session. Each participant will talk on the phone with me and be asked about what were some barriers to coming to the session and what were some things that made it easier to come to the session.

The Interview: The interview will be between ten and fifteen minutes in length and ask participants what things made it easier or harder to come to the parenting session. Questions will include how they found out about it (poster, social media, from a partner, from friends, etc.), what they liked about the session, and what could be changed to make it easier for more men to come. After the interview is finished, I will ask participants if they would like to get an email with all the notes I took of what they said in case they wanted to see my notes or make corrections. They will get the notes within two days of the interview, and will have a week to let me know if there is anything they want to change. If they do not email me within a week, I will assume they are okay with the notes I took. If participants wish to no longer participate in the study, they can withdraw but this must be done within 10 days of completing the interview. I can also email participants a link to the results of the study when it is finished if they are interested. Participants do not have to answer questions if they don’t want to and they can end the interview anytime they want without penalty.

Privacy: The information given to me will remain confidential. Names will not be published in the study and answers to questions will not be associated with names. I will not relate any information that could help identify someone. For example, if someone tells me their child or
partner’s name I will not write it down. All information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law.

**Risks and Benefits:** There are no known risks or direct benefits to being part of this research. A possible benefit to others is providing information that could help remove barriers to fathers’ participation and help more dads take part in parenting education. There is no compensation for being part of this study.

**Conflict of Interest:** Although not a “conflict” of interest, please note that Dr. Philip Smith, my supervisor, was part of the group that worked to have Triple P brought to PEI and helped organize its implementation here. He is also an accredited Triple P seminars facilitator.

If there are concerns about the ethical conduct of this study, you can contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902) 620-5104 or by email at reb@upei.ca.

### Interview Questions

If we do follow up with a phone interview, here are some questions we might ask:

1. What do you remember about how you first learned about the Triple P Parenting session?
2. Why did you feel that it was important for you, as a father, to go to the session?
3. What about the session made it easy for you to go?
4. Was there anything about the session that made it difficult to go?
5. Did you, as a man, feel welcome at the session?
6. Finally, the purpose of my research is to see what things make it hard for dads to go to parenting sessions and what things make it easy for dads to go to parenting sessions. Do you have any more comments you would like to make on this subject that we haven’t already covered?
Appendix E

Interview Questions

1. What do you remember about how you first learned about the Triple P Parenting session?

   Possible Prompts:

   a. If it was a poster…

      i. Where was the poster?

      ii. What about the poster drew you in?

      iii. Do you think the poster was inclusive of men and women? Why?

   b. If it was on social media…

      i. How did you come across the advertisement?

      ii. Did a friend share it? Was it a sponsored ad?

      iii. What about the advertisement drew you in?

      iv. Do you think the advertisement was inclusive of men and women? Why?

   c. If it was from a spouse…

      i. How did they bring it up to you?

      ii. When they brought it up did you want to go immediately, or did they have to convince you?

   d. If it was a friend…

      i. How did they bring it up to you?

      ii. When they brought it up did you want to go immediately, or did they have to convince you?

7. Why do you feel that it was important for you, as a father, to go to the session?

   Possible Prompts…
a. Were you interested in learning a certain skill?

b. Were you hoping to be closer with your child?

c. If you have a partner, did they support your decision to come?
   i. How important was their support to you?
   ii. If they weren’t supportive of you going, would you have still gone?

8. What about the session made it easy for you to go?

Possible Prompts…

   a. Did the timing of the session work for you?

   b. Did you like where the session was held?

   c. Did having childcare provided at the session make it easier for you or your partner to attend?
      i. Would you have both attended if there was no childcare?

   d. Was the information at the session what you had expected to learn about?

   e. Did you, as a man, feel welcomed at the session?
      i. Did the information seem like it was mostly for moms, mostly for dads, or for moms and dads?

9. What about the session made it difficult to go?

Possible prompts…

   a. Was it hard to schedule this session around your work schedule?

   b. Were you unsure if other fathers would be there?

   c. Did you know roughly what the session would be about?

10. Finally, the purpose of my research is to see what things make it hard for dads to go to parenting sessions and what things make it easy for dads to go to parenting sessions. Do you
have any more comments you would like to make on this subject that we haven’t already covered?

Thank you for your participation.

Would you like me to send you an email with the notes I have taken today, in case you would like to make any corrections?

I will send you the notes within the next two days. I will need your response to the notes within a week after receiving them. If I do not hear from you after a week I will assume the notes I took were acceptable.

Would you like me to send you a link to the results of my research when it is finished?

The reason for this study was to see what kinds of things make it easier and harder for dads to go to parenting sessions and you have been really helpful in giving me a father’s perspective on this topic.

Once again, thank you for your participation.
Appendix F

Images in Advertising

Dads and Moms, Stay Positive!
Triple P Parent Education Seminars

✓ Feel confident as a parent
✓ Reduce Stress
✓ Sessions are Free
✓ Childcare Provided

Murphy's Community Centre, Room 207
200 Richmond St, Charlottetown
February 20th 7:00pm-8:30pm
"The Power of Positive Parenting"
February 27th 7:00pm-8:30pm
"Raising Confident, Competent Children"
March 6th 7:00pm-8:30pm
"Raising Resilient Children"
Dads and Moms, Stay Positive!

Triple P Parent Education Seminars

February 27th 7:00pm-8:30pm
"Raising Confident, Competent Children"

✓ Feel confident as a parent
✓ Reduce Stress
✓ Sessions are Free
✓ Childcare Provided

Murphy's Community Centre, Room 207
200 Richmond St, Charlottetown

Dads and Moms, Stay Positive!

Triple P Parent Education Seminars

✓ Feel confident as a parent
✓ Reduce stress
✓ Sessions are free
✓ Childcare provided

Murphy's Community Centre, Room 207
200 Richmond St, Charlottetown

February 20th 7:00pm-8:30pm
"The Power of Positive Parenting"

February 27th 7:00pm-8:30pm
"Raising Confident, Competent Children"

March 6th 7:00pm-8:30pm
"Raising Resilient Children"

FREE PARENTING SEMINARS