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Online parenting support: Guiding parents towards empowerment through single session email consultation

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CHAPTER 5

**Single session email consultation for parents:
An evaluation of its effect on empowerment**

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This chapter is conditionally accepted.

Abstract

This study evaluated the effect of single session email consultation on empowerment of parents. Parental empowerment was measured ($n=96$) through a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire based on the Family Empowerment Scale (Koren, DeChillo, & Friesen, 1992). Practitioners in a control group ($N = 19$) received no intervention; practitioners in an experimental group ($N = 21$) were trained to match the need of the parent and they learned to use empowerment oriented techniques. Parents showed a significant increase in the subscale of self-confidence (Cohen's $d = 0.33$). Study findings lend support to the feasibility of single session email consultation as a brief intervention to improve self-confidence of parents. A training for practitioners did not influence the outcomes.

Keywords: email consultation; parenting support; empowerment; experiment; rct

Introduction

Email consultation is increasingly employed as an instrument to provide counselling (Nieuwboer, Fukkink, & Hermanns, 2013a – Chapter 1; Rochlen, Beretvas, & Zack, 2004) and over the last few years, this service has become widely available to parents in the Netherlands (Nieuwboer, 2011).

One of the goals of parenting support is to strengthen parental empowerment, meaning that a parent experiences an increase in influence, rather than helplessness (e.g., Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010). Empowered parents feel confident, are able to make well-informed choices and can find supportive resources (e.g., August, Realmuto, Winters, & Hektner, 2001). Further, parents who are empowered are capable of influencing their

children's behaviour in a positive way (e.g., Graves & Shelton, 2007; MacLeod & Nelson, 2000), they experience less stress (e.g., Dempsey & Keen, 2008; Thompson, Lobb, Elling, Herman, Jurkiewicz, & Hulleza, 1997) and report higher levels of well-being (e.g., Van Riper, 1999). Parenting support interventions which are aimed at the development of personal and family strengths and competencies and access to helpful resources may support the process towards more empowerment (e.g., Cochran, 1992; Dempsey & Dunst, 2004; MacLeod & Nelson, 2000; Turnbull, Turbiville, & Turnbull, 2000). However, it is not clear whether email consultation can contribute to this goal. The effect of single session email consultation on parental empowerment has not been evaluated.

Contrary to single session email consultation, a supportive partnership between parents and practitioners is mostly described as a relationship of some duration (see for instance, Baumann, Kolko, Collins, & Herschell, 2006; Harwood & Eyberg, 2004; Trivette & Dunst, 2005). In single session email consultation, with a sequence of only one question and one response, the relationship between parent and practitioner is brief and restricted to textual communication only. It is sometimes used as a way to persuade clients to shift to telephone counselling (Harris, Danby, Butler, & Emmison, 2012), to engage in a series of email exchanges (Stofle & Chechele, 2004) or to supplement face-to-face contact (Cornwall, Moore, & Plant, 2008; Harvey et al., 2008).

However, it can also be used to provide counselling and advice (e.g., Bambling, King, Reid, & Wegner, 2008; Chardon, Bagraith, & King, 2011). A parent may access email consultation through an online form on a website, expecting an advice through the same medium. For practitioners, the amount of information about the family situation the parent offers is mostly limited and there may be no response to further in-depth inquiries. Opposed to therapeutic email consultation or a face to face conversation, and based on a possibly very short parenting question, the first response through email may be the only opportunity to communicate with the parent (Zelvin & Speyer, 2004).

Training for online counselling

Many disciplines are involved in providing parenting support, like developmental psychologists, nurses, psychotherapists, social workers, coaches/counsellors, and paediatricians (Daneback & Plantin, 2008; Nieuwboer et al., 2013a – chapter 1; Ritterband & Palermo, 2009). However, practitioners' experience in online counselling is generally low. As a rule, practitioners receive no specific training for online counselling at all, and depend on their professional education, in which online communication - being a relatively new discipline - is currently not integrated.

Matching the need of the parent

Previous literature on traditional forms of parenting support suggests that a match between parental need and professional response will lead to better outcomes (e.g., Edward & Gillies, 2004; Hoagwood, 2005). Dempsey and Keen (2008), based on an extensive literature review, revealed that a match between parental need and service delivery processes leads to more satisfaction, which is, in turn, related to improved parent outcomes. However, some authors expressed concerns about the discrepancy between the intentions of parenting practitioners and the perception of parents about the help-giving orientation of family support (see, for instance, Fordham, Gibson, & Bowes, 2012; Raghavendra, Murchland, Bentley, Wake-Dyster, & Lyons, 2007; Van Riper, 1999) and this may be even more problematic in single session email consultation, being limited in time and means of communication (Bambling et al., 2008; Chardon et al., 2011).

A focused approach to empowerment

In addition to matching the need of the parent, it is suggested that a more focused approach to achieve empowerment improvements in parents can contribute to its effectiveness (Dunst, Boyd, Trivette, & Hamby, 2002; Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2007;

Teti, O’Connol, & Reiner, 1996). Cattaneo and Chapman (2010), in an attempt to clarify the concept and provide a cohesive model for research and practice purposes, described the process of empowerment as an iterative process with four components: *goal-setting*, *action-taking* and *reflecting on impact*, within the *social context*. A successful transition through the process components results in the experience of more influence, particularly in social relations (like families). This model combines both individual and social aspects of empowerment in families, consistent with an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which describes the influence of micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems on families.

Building on this literature, we developed the Guiding the Empowerment Process model (GEP model), which was validated in an online setting (chapter 4). The GEP model distinguishes between ten empowerment oriented techniques, facilitating clarification on each of the earlier mentioned four components of the Empowerment Process model, which can be applied in online communication.

Thus, based on extant literature, we expect that a training, in which the parenting practitioner learns how to interpret the type of question and respond to it accordingly, will lead to a better match and, hence, to more parental empowerment. Also, we expect that the use of specific empowerment oriented techniques in advices will lead to empowerment improvements.

The goal of this study is to evaluate the effect of single session email consultation on parental empowerment and to assess the added value of 1) a training for parenting practitioners, 2) a match between practitioner’s response and the need of the parent and 3) the use of empowerment oriented techniques.

Method

Participants

In 2011, Dutch organizations which offered single session email consultations on parenting were identified using Google Search, and also approached through social media. Organizations were eligible when they offered the service of single session email consultation to parents without commercial goals and free of charge. Working in thirteen community-based practices and nine private practices, forty-five parenting practitioners throughout the Netherlands, all educated on a bachelor or master level, showed interest in the study. After receiving additional information about the research procedures, forty professionals (89%) gave their final consent to participate by completing an online questionnaire with questions about their previous experience in providing email consultations (see Results) and their profession. Amongst the 40 professionals who agreed to participate, different disciplines were represented, like developmental psychologists (42.6%), nurses (15.5%), psychotherapists (11.6%), social workers (10.1%), coach/counsellors (4.7%), paediatricians (0.8%) and other professionals (14.7%). Their experience with writing email advices varied: 31% had no experience at all, 22.5% had written 1-5 advices prior to the research, 14.7% had written 6-10 advices, and 5.4% had written 10-25 advices. A quarter of the practitioners had more experience (≥ 26 emails, 26.4%).

Two hundred and eight parents submitted a parenting question to the participating practitioners during the three month experiment. Of the parents, 135 completed the first questionnaire and consented to participation (65%). We retrieved 129 email communications (both question and advice) for content analysis (96% of all participants). Approximately three quarters of the participating parents completed the second questionnaire (N= 98, 72.5%). However, in two cases the text of either question or advice could not be retrieved. Thus, the sample included 96 complete datasets (71% of consenting parents, 98% of parents with complete data).

Recruitment

During the research period, March 1 to June 1 2012, participating professionals offered single session email consultation to parents as part of their regular services. Additionally, we launched a website which provided direct hyperlinks to all participating professionals. Parents were enabled to choose any participating professional and submit any question concerning parenting. Directly after submitting their question, parents received an email via the parenting practitioner, containing information about the research project and its aims, a consent form and a hyperlink to an online questionnaire (pre-test, see Measures). Before the pre-test was started, participants had to confirm that they were 18 years of age or older. Parents consented to participate by completing the first questionnaire - and only parents who completed the pre-test received a hyperlink to the second online questionnaire (post-test, see Measures). As an incentive to participate in the study, parents were informed that four tickets to a renowned Dutch family theme park were to be allotted to one participant after the research period. All questions were answered within 2-5 days. After a minimum of five days, allowing the advice to be delivered to the parent, we requested the parenting practitioner to send us both question and advice for content analysis and evaluation purposes, but of consenting parents only.

The study adheres to the legal requirements of the study country and all data are available in Dutch and accounted for (first author). The research procedure was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Amsterdam (reg.nr. 2013-EXT-2811).

Experimental design

In a controlled experimental design with a pre-test and post-test, participating practitioners were randomly assigned to the experimental or control group. Before the assignment, we decided to cluster participating practitioners into small groups when they were employed by the same organization, to prevent diffusion of treatment.

Education level and previous experience with email consultation were similar between groups. The experimental group ($N_{\text{exp}} = 21$) received a training in email consultation, consisting of five online practice sessions, self-instruction on the basis of information, a discussion board for trainees, and one group chat session with the instructor (first author) to discuss training content. The control group ($N_{\text{ctrl}} = 19$) received no training nor any other intervention.

Training. The aim of the training was to enable practitioners to recognise the need of the parent, and respond to this need with a matching type of answer. For this purpose, types of needs and answers were divided in two categories, i.e., a parent oriented and a context oriented type (based on chapter 3). The parent oriented type of questions and advices included a focus on parental intentions, strengths and solutions, whereas the context oriented type of questions and responses included referrals to helpful resources within the family, neighbourhood or society. A successful match would mean that a practitioner's response to a parent oriented question is also mainly parent oriented and that the response to a context oriented type of parenting question is also characterised by a context oriented content (see Measures).

The instructor (first author) provided individual feedback on email consultations with a maximum of two 30 minutes sessions per trainee. In total, practitioners needed 20-30 hours to complete the training program. We provided the trainees with a final test case parenting question, which was an anonymised real-life question, drawn from a parent support agency which was not involved in this research, and collected and scored the email advices before the research period with parents started. The score was determined by counting the number of techniques which were successfully applied (9 for each orientation, *min-max*: 0-18) and adding one criterion on correct language use and one criterion on matching the type of question, totalling 20 criteria, assigning 0 (not applied), $\frac{1}{2}$ (applied to some extent) or 1 (convincingly applied) points for each

criterion, subsequently dividing the total score by a factor 2. The score was determined by one assessor. Results for the final test case parenting question showed, on a scale from 0-10, scores ranging from 5.75 to 9.25 (mean: 7.75).

After the training was completed, we identified one good example of every single technique in the emails of all trainees during the training sessions and in the final test case; we listed these ‘good practices’ in a one-time email reminder for the trained practitioners, halfway through the research period of three months.

Masking. Practitioners were not aware if a parent participated in the study or not and parents were not aware whether they received an advice from a trained or a non-trained professional. Furthermore, before content analysis, we removed all elements with which parents, families or practitioners could be identified (e.g., email addresses, letter heads/logo’s, names of family members, people involved, referrals to local organizations) from the records. Also, lay out was converted to a basic format, so that no question or advice could be traced back to specific persons. Further, all sets of questions and advices were randomly assigned to three members of the research team, i.e. two Master students and the first author. Parenting questions were analysed for topic and length. Email advices were all sentence coded by independent researchers.

Measures

Empowerment. The Family Empowerment Scale (Koren, DeChillo, & Friesen, 1992) was slightly adapted to the context of everyday parenting. Independent back-translation of the items was used to prevent misinterpretation of the original scale. Exploratory factor analysis resulted in three subscale factors for this study: Self-confidence as a parent ($\alpha = .85$; e.g., “When problems arise with my child, I know how to handle them”), Confidence in network support ($\alpha = .88$; e.g., “My friends and family are

supportive to me”), and Ability to obtain informational support ($\alpha = .73$; e.g., “I am able to get information to help me better understand my child”), totalling 14 items. Responses are indicated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘very untrue’ (1) to ‘very true’ (5), with higher scores representing more empowerment in positive items and less empowerment in negative items.

Satisfaction. Satisfaction with email consultation was measured using a five-point Likert scale with 1 representing “very unsatisfied” and 5 “very satisfied”.

Content analysis of emails. We developed an extensive coding system to analyse questions and advices; the questions were coded for topic and type, and the advices were coded for type and amount of empowerment oriented techniques. Following recommendations on text analysis of Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter (2000) we tested the coding systems by using textual material which was similar to the sample in this study (other email consultations) to clarify interpretations and define the exclusiveness of all codes.

Questions. We analysed all questions of the parents. Following categories from a Dutch registration system for parenting questions (‘ROTS’), we used an index of five topics namely, parental competence and four areas of child development (emotional, physical, social, cognitive development). Each question was labeled with one main topic by one researcher.

Furthermore, based on previous literature on parent-practitioner communication (chapter 3; Turnbull et al., 2000) we distinguished two types of questions: if the parent conveyed the need for understanding and employing the strengths of his family, trying to improve his own parenting competencies, we coded the question as a *parent oriented need*. If the parent conveyed the need for helpful resources, either by explicitly asking for a professional organization or implicitly asking for external help, we coded the question as a

context oriented need. Multiple needs may be communicated in one email and at different levels of intensity. As a consequence, parental need was coded using a scale from 0-5 (0 = not expressed, 3 = explicitly expressed, 5 = strongly expressed) for each type of need. Subsequently, parental need was characterised as *prevalent* with 3 as the cut-off score.

Inter-coder reliability was estimated by determining Cohen's kappa for a random sample of 20% of the parenting questions. Reliability proved good to excellent for parent oriented questions ($\kappa = 1$) and for context oriented questions ($\kappa = .83$). In the case of divergent codes, final codes were established by discussion.

Advices. Similarly, the texts of email advices were coded, distinguishing between the parent oriented type of response (including sentences which described the needs of family members and the way family strengths could be used) and the context oriented type of response (including sentences which referred to informal or formal helpful resources). Of all sentences in the advices (5,997 in total) 50.3% were assigned a code (3,019 sentences), which means that in these sentences a parent oriented or a context oriented technique was observed. Subsequently, an email advice was categorised as a *prevalent* type of parent-practitioner communication if more than four out of nine techniques per orientation were observed.

Matching need and response. We determined the match between questions and advice, meaning that a practitioner's response to a prevalent parent oriented question was also prevalently parent oriented (e.g., offering compliments and insights in knowledge and strengths); and that the response to a context oriented type of parenting question was also dominated by a context oriented content (e.g., referrals and encouragement to mobilise informal and formal resources). The prevalent match was scored dichotomously as either present (1) or absent (0).

Empowerment oriented techniques. We distinguished ten techniques of the Guiding the Empowerment model. The GEP model comprises ten techniques describing parenting supporting behaviours of professionals, with the specific aim to empower parents (see Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; chapter 4). With regard to *goal-setting*, the practitioner may rephrase the parent's or family's goals and acknowledge the parent's perspective. Related to *action-taking*, he may provide a variety of options and encourage decision-making related to the described goals. Concerning *reflection on impact*, he may describe the needs of involved family members and identify and encourage the use of (new) knowledge or skills. Specifically, the developmental needs of children are a framework through which the impact of actions and goals can be reflected upon. Finally, in order to mobilise the *social context*, the practitioner may show opportunities for all family members to participate in problem-solving, refer to resources in the informal network, refer to resources in the professional context and identify opportunities on multiple community levels. Although parenting practitioners were not explicitly trained to understand and employ this model, they were familiarised with the ten techniques, belonging to the model, as an integrated part of the training.

We determined a GEP score for each email advice: if a technique was observed (either once or more), we assigned one point, and, hence, GEP scores range, theoretically, from 0 to a maximum score of 10; we followed this procedure because the length of the emails showed significant variation which was strongly related to the raw frequencies of the various techniques. Of all sentences (5,997 in total), 39.1% were assigned a GEP technique code (2,349 sentences).

Inter-rater reliability was good (ICC, two-way random, absolute agreement, mean .84). Finally, the realization factor of the GEP model was calculated by dividing the total model outcome by ten techniques (total GEP/10), indicating the mean number of techniques applied in the sample of email consultations. Reliability of the total

GEP score proved to be acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .62$). In a previous study (chapter 4) the GEP scores showed convergent validity with the model of social support, as defined by Braithwaite, Waldron and Finn (1999).

Results

Description of email consultations

Parenting practitioners confirmed that no previous contact or relationship between parent and practitioner preceded the email consultation. Average time spent on writing an email advice was 31-60 minutes; twelve advices were written in less than 15 minutes, eleven responses took more than 90 minutes. Consultations varied widely in length from 115 through 1993 words (mean 698, $sd = 344$).

A dominant theme in the parenting questions was parental competence, including issues like punishment, rules, and arguments (40.6%). Most other questions were related to aspects of child development, in which questions about emotional development prevailed (tantrums, insolence, temperament, and claiming behaviour; 21.1%). Examples of themes in questions about physical development were sleeping and nutrition (18.8%). Most questions on social development involved bullying (12.5%). The other questions concerned the cognitive development of children and several other issues (7%). The age of children concerned varied from 0 to 21 years (mean 8.2 years, $sd = 5.1$). Questions also showed great differences in length, from 9 through 1227 words (mean 232, $sd = 206$).

There were 11 cases (8.5%) in which there was a prevalent match between parent oriented types of questions and advices and 8 cases (6.2%) in which there was a prevalent match between context oriented types of questions and advices. Parents were satisfied with the single session email consultations offered to them (mean 4.2, $sd = .71$).

The effect of single session email consultation on parental empowerment

Parents showed a significant increase in the subscale of ‘Self-confidence’ over time, $F(1, 95)= 19.6, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .17, d = 0.33$, corresponding to a small-to-medium effect. No significant changes were found for the subscales ‘Confidence in network support’ ($p = .19$) and ‘Ability to obtain informational support’ ($p = .27$, see Table 1 for details).

Table 1

Pre-post differences in empowerment

	Pretest $M (SD)^*$	Posttest $M (SD)^*$
Self-confidence		
Trained group	3.68 (0.55)	3.85 (0.44)
Control group	3.64 (0.57)	3.80 (0.50)
Total sample	3.66 (0.56)	3.83 (0.47)**
Ability to obtain informational support		
Trained group	4.17 (0.34)	4.14 (0.32)
Control group	4.06 (0.47)	4.18 (0.41)
Total sample	4.11 (0.41)	4.16 (0.37)
Confidence in network support		
Trained group	3.48 (0.58)	3.48 (0.63)
Control group	3.48 (0.59)	3.57 (0.54)
Total sample	3.48 (0.59)	3.53 (0.59)

Note. Trained group $N = 47$; Control group $N = 49$; Total sample $N = 96$

* Scale 0-5 ** $p < .001$

Three potentially moderating variables (previous experience with providing email consultations, question length and response length) proved not to be related to the outcomes.

We examined the effect of the training of practitioners and found no significant effects for ‘Self-confidence’ ($p = .89$) and ‘Confidence in network support’ ($p = .26$). The subscale ‘Ability to obtain informational support’ showed a difference. However, this outcome is the result of a difference at the pre-test in favour of the experimental group

($d= 0.28$) and a difference in the post-test in favour of the control group ($d= 0.12$), resulting in a small reverse interaction effect, $F(1, 94)=4.89$, $p= .03$, partial $\eta^2= .05$.

Furthermore, a match between prevalent questions and prevalent advice, indicated by the matching score (either present or absent) was only observed in 19 cases out of 129 (14.7%), precluding a strong test of the hypothesised relationship between a matching advice and improvements in empowerment.

The realization factor of the GEP model, indicated by the GEP score, was found to be modest: 4.36 (on a scale of 0-10). The experimental group used, on average, a bit more GEP techniques (realization factor 4.66) than the control group (realization factor 4.03), $F(1, 128)=3.09$, $p= .08$, partial $\eta^2= .02$. The fourth component of the GEP model, guiding the parent towards resources in the context, was significantly more applied by the experimental group ($p=.01$). The trained practitioners more often referred to resources in the informal network, like relatives and neighbours ($p= .03$). They also showed a more ecological approach to parenting questions, referring to resources in at least two different eco-systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, or macro-) ($p= .02$). We found no relation between the use of GEP techniques in advices and the changes in parental self-report on empowerment, $F(3, 92)=.96$, $p= .42$, partial $\eta^2= .03$.

Discussion

Single session email consultation is a relatively new service which provides new opportunities for parents to obtain support. After receiving the advice, parents showed an increase in self-confidence, one of the aspects of empowerment, and were satisfied with this service offered to them. This result indicates that even a short web-based service to parents may be helpful in gaining confidence in how to deal with parenting questions. We found no changes in the ability of parents to obtain informational support and their confidence to rely on network support. In this study, we found that trained

practitioners took a more ecological approach to the parenting questions than non-trained practitioners. However, the two groups of practitioners were not distinctive enough to reach firm conclusions about the effectiveness of their typical approach.

This study investigated the effect of single session email consultation on the level of empowerment in parents with everyday parenting questions. In contrast, the body of literature on parental empowerment traditionally focuses on parenting disabled children (e.g., Turnbull et al., 2000), posing a more stressful condition than is to be expected in regular family life. Indeed, the pre-test scores on the questionnaire in this study were relatively high, showing that parents did not experience a low level of empowerment at the time they submitted a parenting question. In a recent meta-analytic study on 75 parenting programs Leijten, Raaijmakers, de Castro and Matthys (2013) found that initial problem severity was a strong predictor of effect sizes, indicating that parents with more severe problems benefitted more from the services. Therefore, although modest, it is interesting to find an improvement in self-confidence in parents, after such a brief kind of intervention in the setting of daily parenting.

The specific factors that contribute to the improvement in self-confidence through single session email consultation in the context of general parenting questions need further investigation.

This study showed that the results of a training, which was aimed at learning how to recognise the need of the parent and respond to it correspondingly, were too modest to show a general transfer effect on parental empowerment. Establishing a match between service delivery and parental perception has been found problematic in other settings as well (Fordham et al., 2012; Raghavendra et al., 2007; Van Riper, 1999). Further, the claim that a match between parental need and practitioner's advice is desirable

(e.g., Edwards & Gillies, 2004; Dempsey & Keen, 2008; Hoagwood, 2005) can be challenged. Dempsey and Keen (2008) found an indirect relation between the match, through satisfaction with services, on empowerment. However, ‘matching’ is often not clearly defined and in previous studies, the score of ‘matching’ mostly relies on self-reports by parents. In a previous study (chapter 3) we operationalised and theoretically grounded the concept of ‘matching’. Finding a low realization factor of matching in the current study may indicate that practitioners did not interpret a parenting question as being either parent or context oriented. In a setting of online counselling with adolescents Bambling et al. (2008) found that the risk of misunderstanding textual communications (mismatch) is experienced to be larger, compared to face-to-face counselling. Practitioners in our study generally took a broad perspective on the situation and offered different perspectives to open up several new opportunities in solving the issue.

In other words, since it involves a narrowing interpretation and limits the perspective on the parenting issue, matching the need of the parent may not be the best way to provide single session email consultation. It may even be argued that a strict match, as we defined it, distinguishing between family and context, is in conflict with an empowerment oriented approach, in which both family strengths and resources in the context can play such an important role (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010).

A relationship between application of empowerment oriented techniques and its effects on empowerment could also not be confirmed in this study. Content analysis of the emails showed that the techniques were not applied to their full potential and the realization factor of the GEP model, comprising ten empowerment oriented techniques, was modest in both groups. Similarly, Chardon et al. (2011) found a low level of realization of counselling components in single session online consultation with adolescents, specifically in the guidance towards setting goals and planning actions.

This raises the question whether it is feasible to apply a rich, but rather complex model in a brief textual advice. In fact, there is no consensus between counsellors whether the limited time and means of single session online consultation is enough to provide adequate counselling (Bambling et al., 2008).

A relation between the model and improvements in the empowerment of parents was not empirically demonstrated in this study. Further experimental study should clarify whether the model can be realised with more success. Also, different modalities of the model can be investigated in the future, in order to identify the way in which the professional guidance of a process towards more empowerment works.

This study includes a content analysis of email consultations with a high level of reliability between coders, assessment of empowerment in general parenting, and a better understanding of both the implementation and the effect of single session email consultations. Outcomes show that aspects of parental empowerment can be improved by a brief email consultation service.

Limitations

The procedure we followed may have led to self-selection and a stronger representation of participants who preferred online communication over face-to-face contact or no contact at all, which may have affected the empowerment measure in an unpredictable way. Also, because of their expectations of the usefulness of email consultation the participants do not represent all parenting practitioners and all parents, who may be more reluctant to use this medium. Therefore, findings are to be interpreted with this limitation in mind.