

EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY AND PARENTAL REFLECTIVE FUNCTIONING IN SUBSTANCE DEPENDENT PARENTS

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Introduction and Aims: The impact of substance use on parenting and child development is well established. This pilot study aimed to assess changes in substance dependent parents' following completion of Parenting with Feeling (PWF), a 10 week group intervention targeting parental reflective functioning, emotional availability and attachment.

Design and Methods: Demographic and psychosocial data were collected pre, post and 6 months (n=22, parents-infant dyads). Videorecorded parent-infant interactions were rated utilising the Emotional Availability Scales (EAS, 4th edition). The Parent Developmental Interview (PDI) was administered to obtain a total parental reflective functioning score.

Results: Parents who completed PWF had a mean age 30 years (SD±6.7), were predominantly female (73%), non-Aboriginal (76%) had low levels of education (41% <Year 10) and high unemployment (96%), traumatic childhood experiences (100%), receiving and currently on opiate substitution therapy (73%) or other ambulatory substance use treatment. Pre and post data analysis showed clinical improvements in depression, anxiety, borderline symptoms and parent-infant relationships with significant changes in developmental knowledge ($p = .002$), global functioning ($p = .003$), psychological ($p = .013$) and physical health ($p = .006$). Clinical improvements at follow up were non-significant. The presentation will primarily focus on child protection data, parent-infant emotional availability and parental reflective functioning.

Discussions and Conclusions: Preliminary analysis suggested that participants benefited from completing the PWF program.

Implications for Practice or Policy: It is feasible to recruit parents with substance use problems into a targeted parenting program. PWF holds promise as a clinically effective intervention and should be reviewed to improve sustainability of results.

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