

# Empirical Evidence on the impact of Parenting Programmes on family sustainability



UNIVERSITY OF MALTA  
L-Università ta' Malta

Prof Angela Abela  
Department of Family Studies

# Why is parenting important for family sustainability?

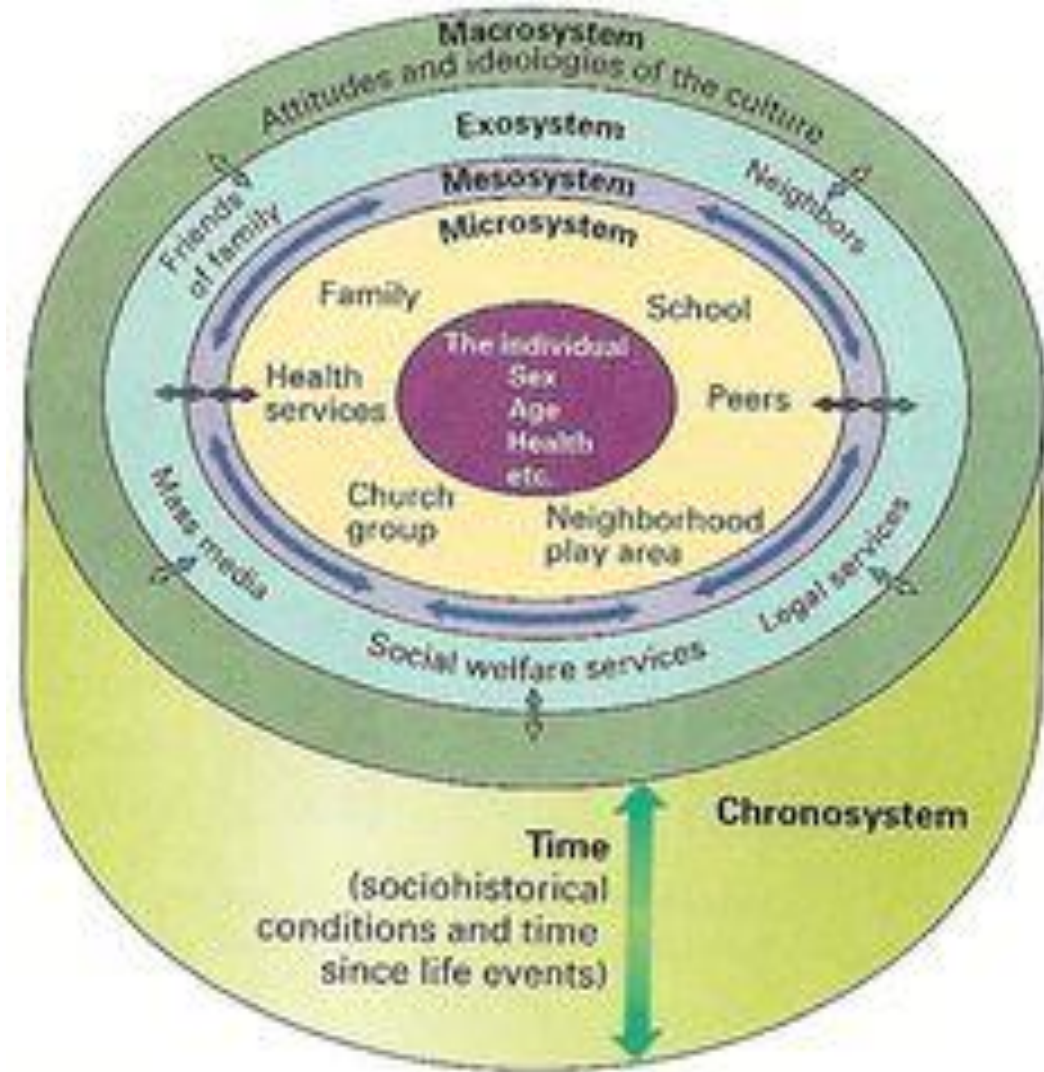
- ◆ The capacity to bond with the child and form a secure attachment promotes social competence, emotional regulation and adjustment (Bowlby 1969,1988),
- ◆ Which would in turn promote stable intimate couple relationships (Hazan & Shaver 1987)
- ◆ The way we are parented is reflected in the way we parent our own children(Steele, Steele & Fonagy 1996)

Parenting education started to be perceived as very effective in the seventies



We now know that **harsh, negligent or inconsistent parenting** is predictive of later negative outcomes: child problem behaviour, delinquency, drug use, family violence, school failure; poor health & mental health (Hoeve et al, 2010).

Parental education was introduced in many countries, once ecologically important policies were in place eg health Employment,



It was not until the 21<sup>st</sup> century that parenting programmes started to be reviewed for their effectiveness

**Systematic reviews** have revealed that some of these programmes have a long term impact on children's conduct disorders and behavioural problems (Van Aar et al 2017; Leijten et al 2018)

Leijtyen et al (2016) also found that some of these programmes could be transported successfully to other countries

# Parents wellbeing also improved

- ◆ The parents' confidence improved. Dekovic et al (2012) found that this process is causally responsible for change in parenting and child behaviour
- ◆ Parents' risk factors for child maltreatment such as depression in parents or parent stress also decreased (Barlow et al 2012)



# Economic studies show that parenting programmes are cost effective

- ◆ They improve child outcomes
- ◆ Public cost of antisocial behaviour is high (Bonin 2011)
- ◆ Preventive interventions are more cost effective (Gardner, Leijten, et al 2017)





# International bodies have now endorsed parental programmes

Council of Europe (Daly 2006; Abela & Berlioz 2006)

WHO (WHO 2010; Wessels et al 2013)

European Commission (Freitag et al 2018)

Unicef (WHO/UNICEF 2016)

The United Nations (UN Office on Drugs and Crime 2009)

As do many countries and Govts all  
over the world

USA  
Canada  
Europe  
Asia  
Australia



# POSITIVE PARENTING

NATIONAL STRATEGIC POLICY  
2016 - 2024

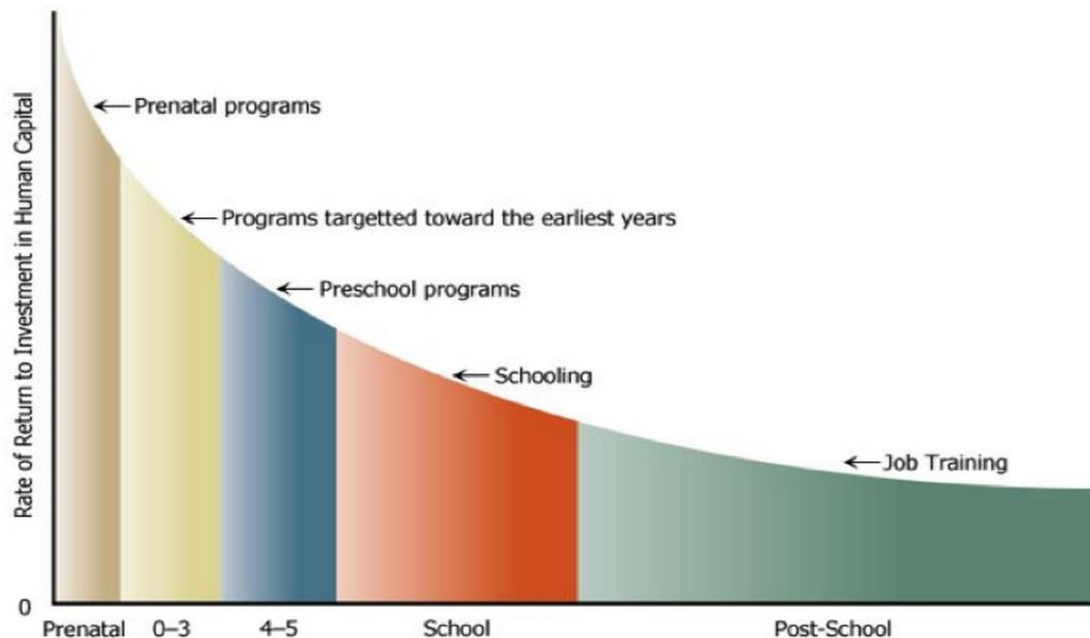


MINISTRY FOR THE FAMILY  
AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

*One such  
example is  
Malta*

# Early childhood development is a smart investment

The earlier the investment, the greater the return



Source: James Heckman, Nobel laureate in economics

Give increased importance to perinatal mental health by providing integrated services for the mother, the baby and the family

BECOMING A PARENT IS A MAJOR LIFE CHANGE.  
KNOW HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH...  
HERE TO HELP.

PERINATAL DEPRESSION  
& ANXIETY  
MENTAL HEALTH WEEK  
[southcoastal.org.au](http://southcoastal.org.au)

## The importance of Screening

- ◆ How to do it in a non invasive way
- ◆ The cost benefit analyses of proper and timely screening (LSE 2014)
- ◆ Petch et al 2012: 30% of parents had 3 or + risks including inter-partner violence during the transition to parenthood.

# Involve Fathers!



# The Future of Parenting Programmes

According to Long (2016) future trends include:

- ◆ More importance given to **cost-effectiveness of parenting education programmes**
- ◆ The use of **technology** in service provision and in the training of professionals
- ◆ More importance given to the **training of parent education providers**
- ◆ More importance given to genetics and biological factors (eg depression, inflammation) in the field of parenting education



Evidence based positive parenting strategies are a must



Child abuse is considered as the most costly public health issue

Thank  
you



[angela.abela@um.edu.mt](mailto:angela.abela@um.edu.mt)