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Planning of the Pilot Program



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Description

This is a pilot experimental application of an integrated multi-level structured violence prevention program in children and adolescents with autism included in the Speak Up Project, a System for the Protection and Empowerment of Autistic Children as victims of abuse or as Unintentional Perpetrators. This project involves several European Associations: Autism Europe, F.M. Regina Association, CIRENEO, National Autistic Society, Autismo Burgos, Alpha Foundation and Progetti Sociali.

Based on two protocols previously developed to assist those responsible for the protection and safeguarding of children and young people with autism that complements existing policies and procedures and provides specific information and guidance in relation to children and young people with autism, the aim of this program is to reduce the risk of abuse for children and young people with autism and is intended to be an information resource.

It is important that parents receive information about what is autism, why children with ASD are a group at high risk as being victims of violence and how it impacts on their child and particularly information about understanding communication and behaviour and general strategies of how to manage behaviour. The hypothesis to start this program and meet these parental needs is that parental training is an important factor of protection in order to prevent violence and empower children with ASD. Promoting positive education skills in parents will improve the resilience in their children and modify behaviour problems. Early interventions with families can prevent violence, thus this training action should prevent the risk of mistreatment of children with ASD.

This program planning, which is part of the Workstream 3 of the Speak Up project and it is in charge of a scientific committee, will be structured in three different components or activities:

1. Drafting of the multitarget pilot program based on the developed protocols/toolkits in Workstream 2; it will address a primary prevention of maltreatment on children with autism, secondary prevention on cases at risk and tertiary prevention for children victims of violence.
2. Testing of the program on at least ten cases in each participating country.
3. Evaluation of the results of the experimentation.

Objectives

The objectives of this pilot program, which is part of the Workstream 3 of the Speak Up project are:

1. Provide an educational path of resilience and empowerment for the child with autism to increase protective factors calibrated on the basis of the level of prevention
2. Provide tools for parental training focused on positive parenting method and parental counselling
3. Provide aids and tools for the prevention of violence against these children and adolescents

Is expected that after the program is implemented, most of the indicators will improve and the violence indicators will decrease.

Methodology

Piloted in 4 different countries, with at least 40 participating families, the program will be carried out always with a confidentiality policy, ensuring privacy and anonymity for the participating families.

Participants

The selected sample of the program will be composed by at least 10 families of children with ASD aged between 3 and 18 years old in each participating country, but it should be bigger whenever it is possible and if the work conditions allow it. This group will be divided in two subgroups, one formed by the families of children with intellectual disability and other with families of children with Asperger syndrome children.

Materials

- Two projectors
- Two rooms wide enough with chairs in one of our buildings
- Two computers

Instruments

- Two different presentations in power point format (one for families with children with intellectual disability and one for families with children with Asperger syndrome)
- Evaluation questionnaire to consider the satisfaction of the participants with the training action
- Evaluation questionnaire to measure the results of the training action

Procedure

In first place, it will be made a call for the families that might be interested in participating in this pilot program by sending a letter explaining it. All families of children and adolescents in the Autism Spectrum with ages between 3 and 18 years old can participate. This should be the only criteria to take into account, since each and every one of these kids are at risk, and therefore primary, secondary or tertiary prevention will be taking place.

Once we have a sample, two groups must be formed:

- *Experimental group*: which will attend the training course to prevent violence. In turn, this group must be split in two different groups for the training session: group A, formed by parents of children with intellectual disability and group B, formed by parents of children with Asperger Syndrome. The reason for this division is that these children have different needs, different problems and different ways of learning and facing the difficulties they might find (as the questionnaires developed in Workstream 1 of the project showed, children with intellectual disability are more likely to suffer from negligence as a kind of violence, and children with Asperger Syndrome are more vulnerable in the educational context, due to the fact that they attend ordinary schools and they are frequently victims of bullying and cyberbullying), so the contents of the training course will be slightly different for Groups A and B.
- *Control group*: which will not attend the training action.

The contents of the training activities (both for experimental group A and B) are specified in *Appendix 1* and attached to this document in Power Point format. It would be relevant and appropriate a local adaptation of this material using different examples to illustrate the theory, suitable for each country or association, making possible that these contents fit for the needs of the participating families in order to make it easier for them to understand what can they do for their child.

The duration of the training course will be one session of 4 hours with a break, a time long enough to talk about all the different aspects that a family should know to empower their child against violence and manage challenging behaviours from them, but short enough to facilitate the participation. Also, offering a baby-sitting service, if the Association have the possibility to organize it, might facilitate the attendance to the course for those parents of youngest children.

Two professionals will be required to give the course to the experimental group, one of them will train the *group A* of parents and the other one the *group B*. These professionals must have enough experience working with children and adolescents with intellectual disability or Asperger syndrome in either case, and knowing the families that will attend the training activity will be an advantage, since the professional knows their specific problems and the families feel more comfortable.

After the course, an evaluation questionnaire (*Appendix 2*) will be handed out to the participants in order to evaluate the quality of the training course, including questions about the contents (if they meet the parents and children needs), the person who gives the training activity, the methodology and materials used, the organization, etc.

Evaluation of the results

The outcomes of the application of the pilot program will be evaluated and measured on a specific control group. In order to monitor the success and positive results of the pilot program, both the control group of parents (those who did not attend the training course) and the experimental group, will answer a second questionnaire (*Appendix 3*) with the following issues a month after the training course has taken place:

- Level of information regarding the topics discussed
- Perception of risk and safety
- Improvement of family relationships
- Improvement of relationships between family, school and community
- Increase of nonviolent conflict resolution strategies
- Reduced levels of violence observed at home, school and other contexts

The evaluation process measures the activity of the project and it determines the extent to which the project is being implemented and planned. This outcome evaluation will answer the question of whether the pilot program has achieved its goal or not.

Conclusions

The evaluation of the outcomes of the Workstream 3 applied in each participating Association in the project, will be shared in order to provide feedbacks and draw a conclusion about the effectiveness of the pilot program to improve the capacity of reduction of abuse on children with autism so that these results can be presented at the Final Dissemination Conference in Scerne di Pineto (Italy).