

## **Intervening early to promote public health: The Circle of Security Parenting program**

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Maternal mental health problems have been identified as a major public health issue by the World Health Organisation, not least for their consequences for the children of affected parents. It is well established that maternal mental health and infant and child mental health are linked, and that the treatment of maternal depression and anxiety symptoms alone (without support for the parent-infant relationship) is not sufficient to improve infant and child outcomes. Consequently, many Australian perinatal mental health services are supplementing treatment of maternal mood disorders by offering support for the parent-infant/young child relationship using the 8 session Circle of Security Parenting program (COS-P). As COS-P was specifically designed as a scalable intervention to prevent early parent-child relationship difficulties, it has clear public health potential to support infant and child mental health. However, COS-P dissemination has dramatically outpaced evaluation, with further evidence needed regarding its effectiveness, especially in complex real world settings where it is being delivered. This paper reports findings from a study evaluating the effectiveness of the COS-P intervention in four Australian services – Tresillian Family Care Centres and St John of God Health Care Raphael Services (Sydney), and ACT Health Perinatal Mental Health Consultation Service and Marymead Child and Family Centre (Canberra). Outcomes include changes in 1) parenting capacities linked to infant social and emotional development, and 2) parent mood. Preliminary analyses (n = 67) indicate significant pre-post improvements in parenting efficacy, hostility, sense of helplessness and capacity to keep the child in mind (self-report questionnaire). We will report questionnaire results for 150 parents as well as preliminary data on 1) changes in parent representations and 2) mind mindedness coded from narrative interviews, and 3) changes in interaction quality coded from observed parent-child interactions.