



**Evaluation of the
*Strengthening Families, Strengthening
Communities Programme*
2005/6 and 2006/7**

**Summary Report
Prepared for the Race Equality Foundation**

January 2009

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About this summary report

This summary report is based on the second evaluation of the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities Parent* Programme to be published by the Race Equality Foundation. The full report and the earlier evaluation reports are available from: www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk.

About the Race Equality Foundation

The Race Equality Foundation promotes race equality in social support (what families and friends do for each other) and social care (what workers do for people who need support). We do this by exploring what is known about discrimination and disadvantage. We develop interventions that will overcome barriers and promote equality and we disseminate good practice through training, conferences and written material. The Foundation is a registered charity and further information is available at: www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk.

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1 : Introduction

This summary report presents the findings of the evaluation of the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* parenting courses held over two years, between April 2005 and March 2007. This programme is based on a culturally sensitive curriculum originally developed in the USA in the early 1990s.

The programme is designed for parents/carers with children aged 3 to 18 years. It consists of an introductory session followed by 12 three-hour sessions held on consecutive weeks. Information is presented within a cultural framework covering five areas: cultural/spiritual; rites of passage; positive discipline; enhancing relationships/violence prevention; and community involvement. The course is designed to enhance parent competence, parent/child interactions, child competence, parent relationships and community involvement. It is based on developing the participants' strengths using a facilitative approach.

Individual agencies are responsible for the setting up and delivery of the courses. The role of the Race Equality Foundation is to support the deployment of the programme; provide facilitator training, expert support and supervision; ensure that the quality assurance system is implemented; and facilitate the evaluation of the programme.

2 : The evaluation design

As part of the programme's built-in evaluation process, a Course Summary Report (CSR) was completed on each course by the course facilitator(s) and three forms were completed on or by the individual participants: a registration form completed by the course facilitator, a pre-course assessment questionnaire and a post-course assessment questionnaire, both completed by the participant her/himself. The pre- and post-course assessment questionnaires were designed to measure whether there were any differences in the participants' responses to a series of statements before and after attending the course.

The evaluation design provided information to evaluate the programme in terms of process, outputs and immediate outcomes. The design did not cover medium- or longer-term outcomes and there was no control group against which to compare the results.

3 : Information available for the evaluation and limitations of the data

Information was provided on 205 courses. A CSR was available for 204 of these, and data on individual participants was provided for 152 (74%) of the courses. Forms were provided on a total of 1,919 individual participants:

- Registration forms were provided for 1,748 participants (91%).
- All three forms were provided for 874 (46%) of the participants.
- Both the pre- and post-course forms, but no registration forms, were returned for an additional 23 participants (1%).

Therefore, a total of 897 (47%) of the 1,919 participants completed both the pre- and post-course assessment questionnaires.

A strength of this evaluation model is that the information required for the evaluation was built into the process of running the course. However, in practice there were a number of limitations, including:

- There were difficulties in ensuring that all the required forms were completed and returned to the Race Equality Foundation.
- Some of the forms that were returned were not fully completed.
- This evaluation model focuses mainly on those who successfully completed the course and provides only limited information on participants who dropped out of the course.
- As the data was incomplete, it was not possible to use the information from the registration forms and the pre-course assessment questionnaires to compare the characteristics of those who dropped out with those who successfully completed the course.

Although the data was incomplete, a wealth of information was provided on a large number of participants and courses.

4 : The reach of the programme

Courses were held in all of the nine English regions, except North East England. Around two-thirds of the courses were held in London.

The courses were run by a wide range of agencies — voluntary, statutory and partnership organisations, and community groups. During the two years, a number of new agencies became involved with the programme. Each broad type of agency was able to access a range of ethnic groups. In some cases, where courses were arranged by organisations serving specific ethnic or religious groups this assisted with recruiting participants from specific ethnic backgrounds.

The courses were usually held on a weekday morning. This favoured attendance by people who did not work normal office hours. Almost half of the courses were targeted at specific groups. These included: parents/carers of children at specific schools; specific geographical areas, including Sure Start areas; parents of youth offenders; specific ethnic groups; refugees; single parents; and teenage parents.

The methods of recruitment most frequently used by the course organisers were flyers/brochures, announcements and talking to parents/word of mouth. Just over half of the courses also had some parents referred to them by agencies.

Ethnic background, country of origin and first language

The courses reached a wide range of ethnic groups; 86% included participants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Overall, 61% of the participants were of black and minority ethnic origin. Over a quarter of the participants were Black or Black British, 20% were Asian or Asian British and the remaining 14% were of Chinese, Mixed Heritage, Middle Eastern or Other ethnicity (see Chart 1 opposite).

The courses covered people from a wide range of countries of origin as well as people who were born in the UK. There were also participants from some new countries, which did not feature in the previous evaluation.

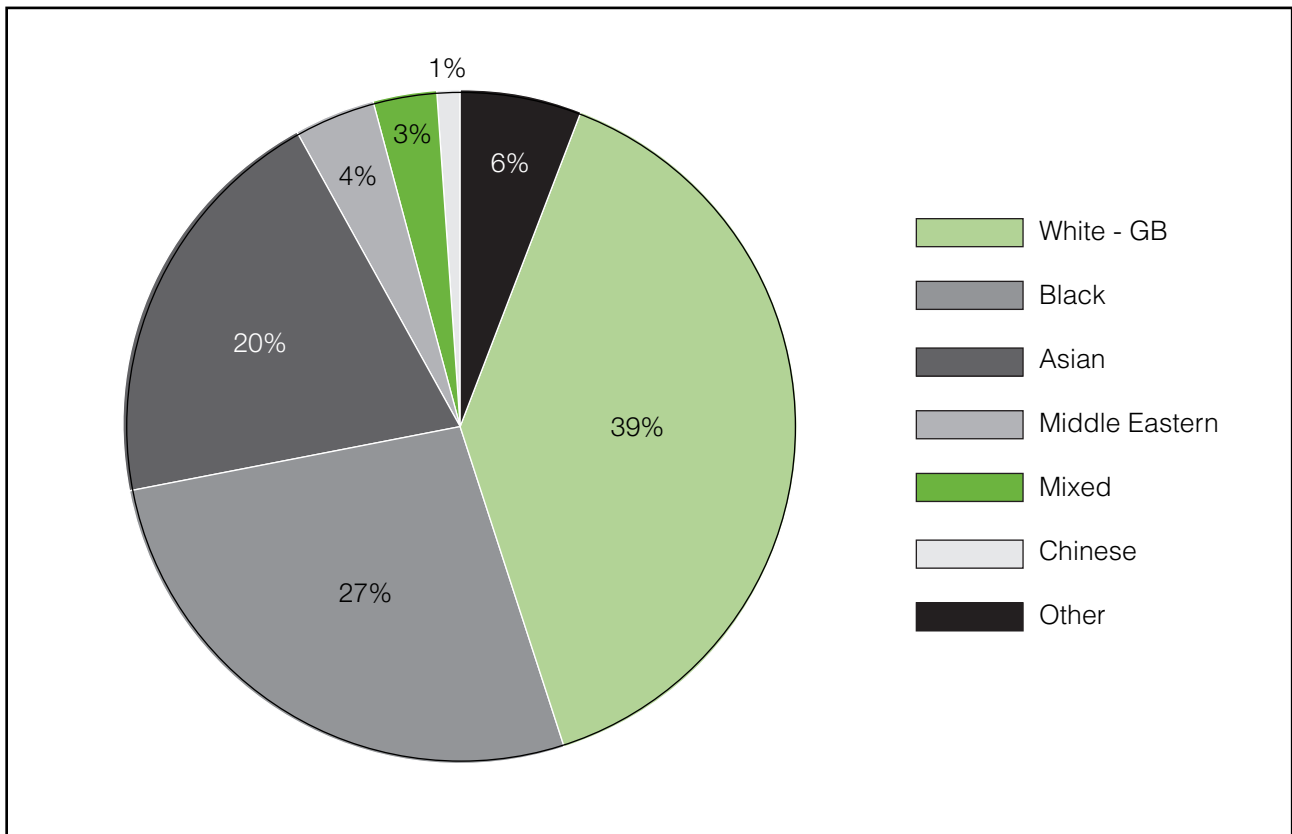
Over a third of the participants had a first language other than English, and a total of 46 languages were mentioned as a first language.

Gender of the participants

Whilst most of the participants were female, a small, but significant, proportion were male (10%). This is similar to the 11% in 2004/5.

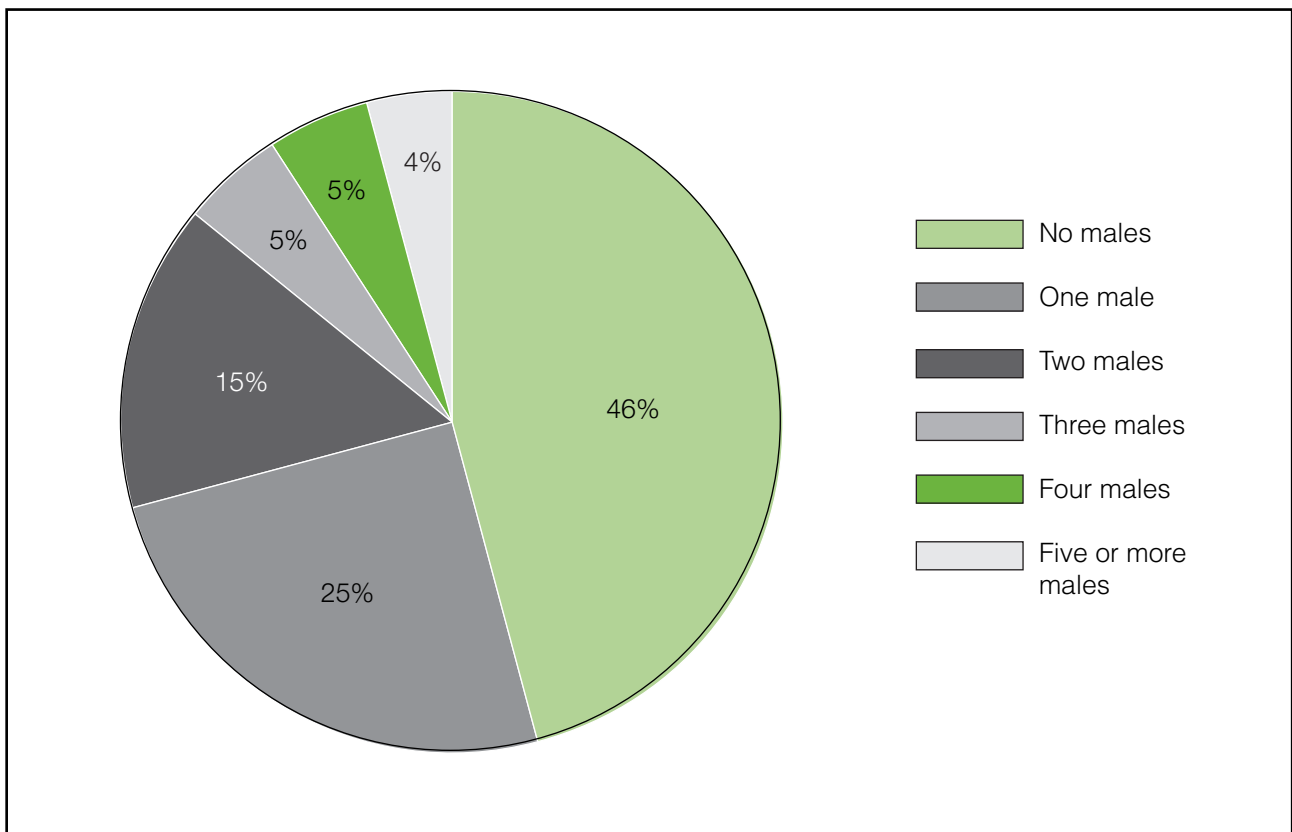
Just over half of the courses (54%) included at least one male participant (see Chart 2 opposite). This was higher

Chart 1 : Broad ethnic background of the participants



Source: Participants data n = 1,381

Chart 2 : Number of male participants on individual courses



Source: Participants data on courses. Number of courses = 151

than in 2004/5 when 39% of courses had a male participant. There was one male on a quarter of the courses (38 courses) and there were two males on 15% of the courses (22 courses). A further 10% of the courses attracted three or four males and 4% of the courses included between five and eight male participants.

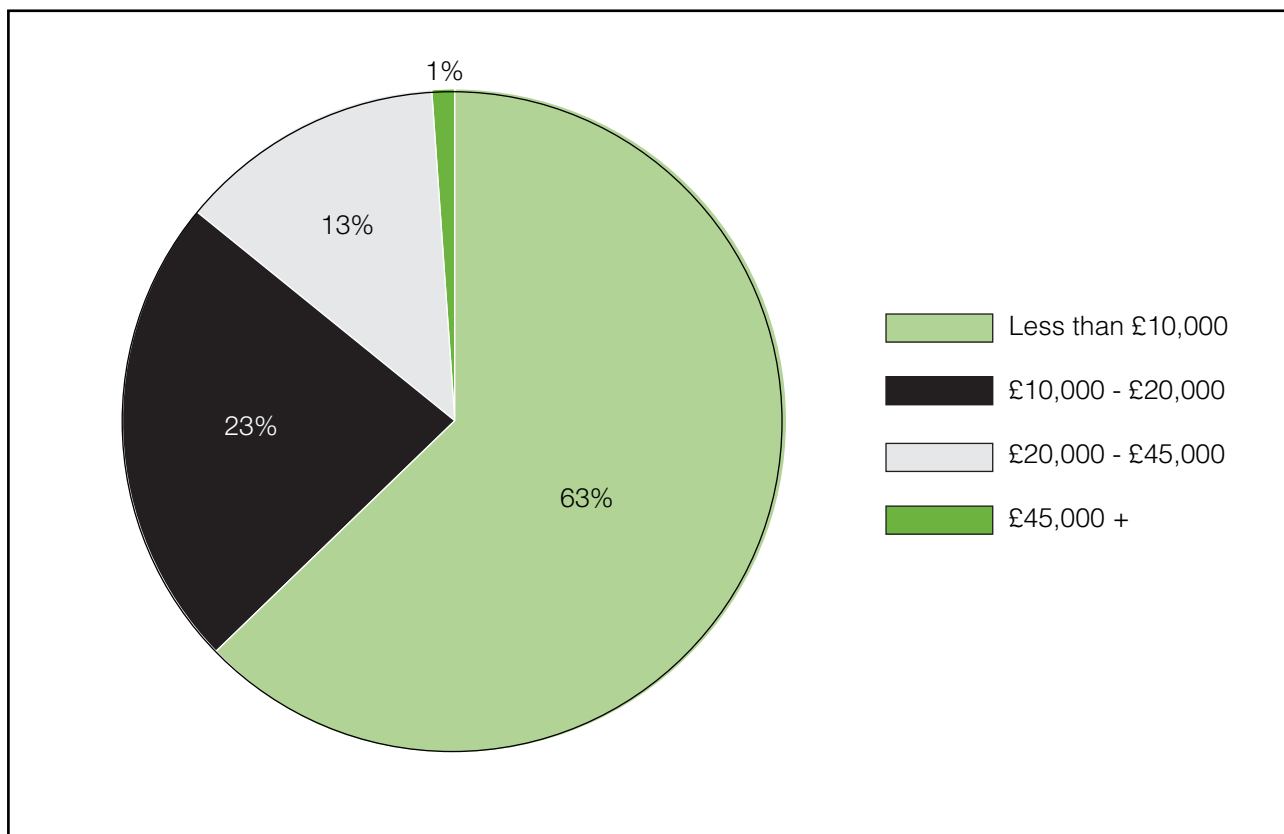
Other characteristics of the participants

The participants' responses suggested that they had a range of annual household incomes. However, these were concentrated in the lower income bands (see Chart 3 below). The largest grouping (63%) had an annual household income of under £10,000. Approaching a quarter (23%) had a household income of between £10,000 and £20,000. Less than 15% had a household income of over £20,000.

Over half of the participants were living as a two-parent family, 43% were single parents, 3% were grandparents and 3% had Other relationships with the children. Just over half of the participants' children were male.

Nearly a quarter of the participants had attended a parent education course in the past. Most people (84%) stated that they were attending the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* course to become a better parent; a third said that they were having problems with a child; 10% came with the intention of learning about drugs and violence; and 3% were ordered to attend by the court.

Chart 3 : Annual household income



Source: Participants data: $n = 1,132$

5 : Fidelity of delivery of the programme

The *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* Programme clearly states the structure and format for the courses. The fidelity of the delivery of the programme was examined in terms of adherence to the programme format and the curriculum.

The programme is designed to be run by at least two facilitators for each course. This was adhered to in 99% of cases.

The course is designed for between 12 and 14 sessions. Nearly three-quarters of the courses complied with this, but just over a quarter did not, and most of these had fewer sessions.

Most of the courses had the recommended size of between 8 and 20 participants. However, at least 12% were smaller or larger than the recommended size.

The course is designed for participants with children aged 3 to 18 years. The available figures suggested that at least 90% of the participants on the courses had at least one child aged 3 to 18 years.

There was evidence that in some cases the curriculum was delivered as specified and that in some cases changes in emphasis to the components of the curriculum and modifications to the content had been made.

6 : Course attendance

Attendance information that was internally consistent was provided for 126 of the 204 courses (62%). Out of the 126 courses, three-quarters of the participants who attended at least two sessions also completed/graduated from the course. A further 10% attended at least half the sessions but did not graduate. The drop-out rate for participants who attended at least two sessions was 15%. These figures are similar to those for 2004/5, when the drop-out rate was also 15%.

On just over half of the courses some people had dropped out due to personal/family problems and on a third of the courses people had dropped out due to a conflict in schedule. The most striking difference between these figures and the figures for reasons for drop-out in 2004/5 was the increase in the number of courses that reported participants dropping out due to medical problems. Only 13% of courses recorded people dropping out due to medical problems in 2004/5 compared with 29% for these two years 2005/6 and 2006/7.

7 : The participants' views of the programme

The impact of the programme was examined in relation to the participants' views of the course and their future plans.

The participants rated the course very highly:

- Over 80% rated all aspects of the information presented in the curriculum and all aspects of the way that the course was conducted as Very good or Good, and some aspects were rated as Very good or Good by over 90%.
- Nearly all the participants (99%) said that they would recommend the course to their family and friends.

However, they viewed the information on community involvement less favourably than the information on the other components of the curriculum.

Around 86% of participants added that they planned to participate in a parent group after graduating from the course and over 90% of the facilitators said that the participants planned to continue meeting after the course.

However, fewer than half the agencies ran parent support groups after the course and even fewer offered child support groups. It therefore appears that the parents' expectations for support after completion of the course were unlikely to be met directly through parent support groups provided by the agency that organised the course they had attended.

8 : Impact of the programme on the participants and their children

A total of 897 participants completed both the pre- and post-course questionnaires. This paired sample was used to assess the impact of the programme in terms of reported behavioural changes in the participants and their 1,249 children.

In most respects the characteristics of this paired sample were very similar to the characteristics of the full sample. The most noteworthy differences were in respect of household income and the participants' status in relation to their children. The responses of the paired sample and the full sample to the pre-course questionnaire were also very similar.

The responses by the paired sample to the pre- and post-course assessment questionnaires were tested for statistical significance. The McNemar test was used for the questions on community focus, as these had Yes / No responses. The Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Signed Rank Test was used for the remaining statements. The changes in the responses were tested for statistical significance at the 95% confidence level; that is, to test whether the significance value (p) was 0.05 or less.

The changes in the participants' responses to the statements in five areas were all statistically significant, except for one statement, and the results indicated that the course led to:

- an increase in family activities and discussions;
- an increase in the use of positive discipline and communication strategies;
- a decrease in the use of negative discipline and communication strategies;
- an increase in the participants' competence;
- an increase in the children's competence.

There were two statistically significant differences in the changes in the participants' responses to the five questions on community focus. These were for youth group activities and having a support network of friends and family. The changes in the responses to the other three questions were not statistically significant. This indicated that the course had limited immediate impact on the participants' level of community involvement.

Overall, the changes in the responses to the pre- and post-assessment questionnaires indicated that the course had a positive impact on the participants and their children.

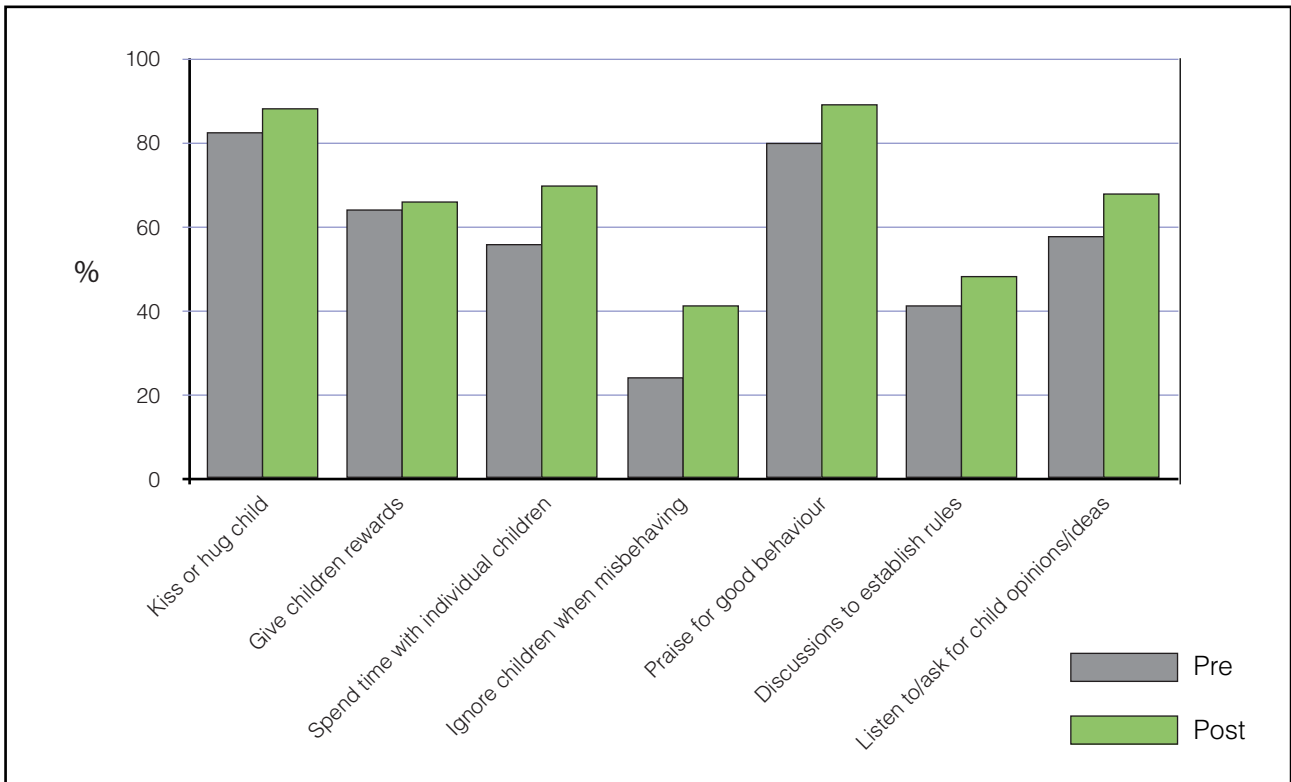
Chart 4 (opposite) shows the pre and post responses to the positive discipline and communication strategies. The percentage who responded Always / Usually in the post-course questionnaire increased for all seven statements.

Chart 5 (opposite) shows the pre and post responses to the negative discipline and communication strategies. The percentage who responded Rarely / Never in the post-course questionnaire increased for all five statements.

Chart 4 : **Positive discipline and communication strategies**

Comparison of pre and post responses ('Always'/'Usually' combined)

(Paired sample)

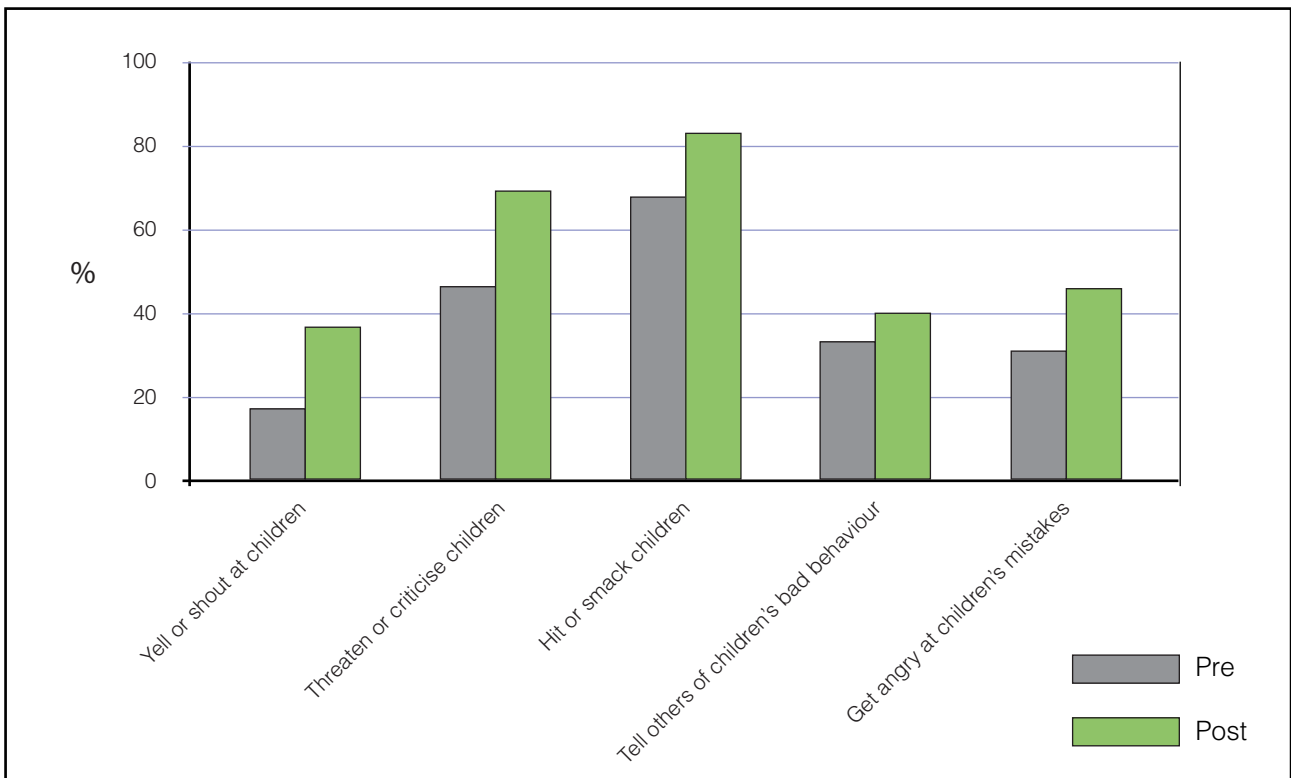


n varied between 848 and 891

Chart 5 : **Negative discipline and communication strategies**

Comparison of pre and post responses ('Rarely'/'Never' combined)

(Paired sample)



n varied between 862 and 882

9 : Conclusions

The evaluation covered data from a total of 205 courses with over 1,900 participants. Nearly 900 participants completed before and after assessment questionnaires. This evaluation was therefore based on a much larger number of participants than has been possible with a single UK-based parenting course to date. The results are therefore less likely to be due to chance. In addition, many of the results are similar to those found for the evaluation of the 2004/5 programme (Wilding and Barton, 2007), which further validate the findings of this report.

The completion of all the documents continues to be a challenge for some facilitators. No data on individual participants was provided for a quarter of the courses and the data on individual participants that was provided was often not fully completed. In addition, not all the CSRs were completed with sufficient rigour to enable cross-checking with the participants' data. It would enhance the evaluation if the challenges associated with the completion of the forms could be addressed. It may then be possible to compare those who complete the course with those who drop out of the course, to investigate whether there are any differences between the two groups.

The *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* Programme continues to expand and agencies have now delivered the course in eight of the nine English regions. However, London is still the core area where courses are provided.

The programme continues to reach a number of important groups, both in terms of the aims of the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* itself and government policy.

It continues to attract participants from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds with a wide variety of first languages. This includes people who have recently arrived in the UK as well as people in more established communities. There were also participants from some new countries, which did not feature in the previous evaluation. Overall, 61% of the participants were of black and minority ethnic origin.

Some courses were organised for specific ethnic/religious groups so that the specific needs of these groups could be catered for. Most of the courses included participants from a mix of ethnic backgrounds and this could make an important contribution to increasing community cohesion in local areas.

There were more White British participants compared with 2004/5. These were more likely to have been referred to the course by the courts or an agency.

Overall, the involvement of male participants remains low in comparison to female participants. However, over half of all the courses now have at least one male participant.

The male participants are less likely to have custody of their children, compared with the female participants. They are more likely to have been referred to the programme by the courts or an agency and to have no previous experience of a parent education class.

The programme also successfully reaches people from a range of other social groups and/or people facing a range of social issues. This includes:

- people on low incomes;
- single parents;
- teenage parents;
- grandparents;
- refugees;

- people with varying levels of education;
- people on court orders and/or referred through the criminal justice system;
- parents who do not have custody of their children.

The list above includes people who are sometimes viewed as hard to reach or seldom heard. By working through local agencies and community groups, the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* Programme demonstrates that these groups can be reached and encouraged to participate in this type of course.

Most of the courses follow the programme requirements most of the time. A small number of the courses did not follow the recommended model for the course in respect of: the number of facilitators; the length of the course; the number of participants on each course; and the ages of the participants' children. Some courses had as few as 10 sessions. The extent to which these changes to the recommended format of the programme affected the outcomes of the course is not known.

There is evidence that in some cases the curriculum was delivered as specified and that in some cases changes in emphasis to the components of the curriculum and modifications to the content had been made. The degree to which this is a matter for concern is open to debate.

Some research has indicated that better attendance leads to more change, with between 8 and 10 sessions usually needed to achieve substantial improvements (Scott *et al*, 2006). The facilitators took a number of actions to support participants' continued attendance on the courses and, out of those who attended at least two sessions, only 15% dropped out. This is a satisfactory figure for this type of course.

The evaluation highlighted some issues in relation to developing community involvement as a result of participation in the course:

- The facilitators reported that the community involvement component of the curriculum was more frequently emphasised less than the other components.
- The participants viewed the information on community involvement less favourably than the information on the other components of the curriculum.
- Whilst both the participants and the facilitators indicated that the participants were keen to continue meeting after completion of the course, it appeared unlikely that their expectations for support would be met by the agencies organising the courses.
- The responses to the questions on community focus in the before and after questionnaires indicated that there had been less change in this area than in other aspects of the participants' lives.

The report of the Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder project (Lindsay *et al*, 2008) also identified this as an issue for concern and suggested that explicit attention should be given to addressing this matter.

The participants had very positive views of the course and nearly everyone reported that they would recommend it to their family and friends.

The changes in the responses to the pre- and post-assessment questionnaires indicated that the course led to:

- an increase in family activities and discussions;
- an increase in the use of positive discipline and communication strategies;
- a decrease in the use of negative discipline and communication strategies;
- an increase in the participants' competence;
- an increase in the children's competence;
- limited immediate impact on the participants' level of community involvement.

Overall, the changes in the responses to the pre- and post-assessment questionnaires indicated that the course had a positive impact on the participants and their children.

The *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* Programme continues to be an important programme nationally. It delivers parenting programmes through a wide range of agencies to a diverse range of participants. It successfully reaches black and minority ethnic participants and members of social groups that have been identified as key target groups for parenting courses.

The programme has a structured format and content that is generally adhered to, but also has some built-in flexibility to cater for the needs of specific groups. The drop-out rate is within acceptable limits for this type of course. The participants have very positive views of the course. The measurement of the impact of the course through before and after questionnaires indicates that the participants and their children benefited from the course.

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