Implementing Child–Parent Psychotherapy in Sweden

A Qualitative Study Exploring Experiences by Caregivers Taking Part of the Intervention with Their Child

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Implementing Child–Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) in Sweden: A Qualitative Study Exploring Experiences by Caregivers Taking Part of the Intervention with Their Child

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Participants

- Swedish caregivers participating in CPP
- Interviewed the first 11 caregivers to complete 5 dyadic sessions (post foundational phase)
  - 10 mothers and 1 father
- Children aged 3-7 years ($M=4.9$)
- All children had witnessed IPV against mother, 55% had also experienced physical abuse by their fathers
Procedures

• 30-60-minute semi-structured interviews covering the following themes
  – Acceptance of the features of the method
  – Degree of satisfaction
  – Conditions for implementation of the method
  – Practical realization
  – Adaptation needs
• Interviews transcribed and examined for themes using interpretative phenomenological analysis
6 Themes (Themes 1 to 3)

1. Developing as a parent by working out understanding, tools, and confidence:
   CPP helped them to learn, develop, and improve as parents

2. Children’s experiences of and benefits from CPP therapy
   – All expressed how much their child appreciated CPP
   – Awareness of the importance of validation and respect of the child’s history and expressions
   – Valued the effects of being heard, seen, and treated as an independent individual with unique experiences and ways of expressing them in therapy
   – Positive gains linked to the trauma focus in CPP. A capacity in the child to comprehend and share the trauma story.

3. Play as a reflection of trauma & a pathway to communication, processing, & recovery:
   Caregivers recognized play as a legitimate tool for communication, sharing, and working through important topics in depth
6 Themes (Themes 4-6)

4. **The importance of the CPP therapist:** Validation, support and cooperation
   - Being acknowledged by the therapist as someone telling a personal history worthy of recognition
   - Being validated as a parent with legitimate reasons to need support
   - The relationship described as a place where sharing of diverse emotions and experiences could take place

5. **Opinions and suggestions concerning the CPP method**
   Wish for more time alone with the therapist and more opportunities for verbal exploration of experiences and thoughts with the child in therapy.

6. **Barriers of legislation, responsibility, and violence**
   Issues connected to obtaining consent, participation, and visitation with fathers.
Summary

- Swedish caregivers with children profoundly affected by IPV reported appreciating and benefiting from treatment with CPP
- Positive impact on child mental health and development
- CPP can be practiced satisfactorily by Swedish CAMHS staff without adjustments
Quotes from Caregivers
Translated from Swedish
Examples Theme 1: Developing as a parent by working out understanding, tools, and confidence

• “To start with, you are traumatized yourself. So, there is lack of focus and you fear the whole situation, you fear the future and all kind of threats. And the fact that you realize that this is how children react when they are witnessing violence.”

• “You become aware of the emotional aspects of what is going on. She had the opportunity to express herself [in therapy] and meet with an adult listening. And further, the fact that I then grew calmer! She benefits from that when I am becoming calmer.”

• “I dare now to recognize her feelings, and we can start a conversation, kind of. And I feel that I nowadays also know when to stop it, when not to put pressure on her.”
Examples Theme 2: Children’s experiences of and benefits from CPP therapy – a caregiver perspective

- “This was the first place where she felt affirmed, really. Where she met with someone who listened and understood and kept talking, even though she was playing.”

- “Now she said to me the other day, ‘I am actually angry now and I am allowed to be!’ [Laughter]. And that is such a relief. She really needs it. Really.”

- “No separation anxiety any longer, generally happier. The fact that it is possible to talk openly about what happened. It is obvious this has been helpful. Yes, we have talked forthrightly about the event. That part has been good and untangled many knots.”
Examples Theme 3: Play as a reflection of trauma and a pathway to communication, processing, & recovery

- “When we played in the sandbox, she always used a bad character, the bad one who comes and destroys . . . and I thought that was interesting to see—there is something here, like she wished to express ‘look at this’ in a way. ‘I want to tell something with this.’"
- “She has played in the sandbox in therapy and told in her way about some things that are really hard for her, that she caries inside. She gets to express her feelings without pressure, and at the same time, I get some insight into her situation.”
- “So, I believe I have seen a lot in play. To begin with, when he dominated all, there were lots of policemen. And they were supposed to crash into the animals. Then, he started to play with the animals, wrestling, hitting, and dying . . . that kind of stuff and violence. So, we played like that. But then, suddenly the therapist said, ‘Are we going to wrestle today?’ And he answered, ‘No, there is no need to.’ And it was like flipping a switch. Suddenly we played soccer with the animals and all was just nice and peaceful.”
- “And she felt very, very abandoned, and in play she can express that, and I am able to understand the way she felt.”
Examples Theme 4: The importance of the CPP therapist: Validation, support and cooperation

• “It felt a bit like a relief coming here. And I understood that they understood our experience. And I could also see that they had recognized my child as an abused child.”

• “I have had a lot of appreciation that what I do, and feel is okay.”

• “Being present and hearing and understanding the problems of your child. Not sitting on your own and waiting outside.”

• “We have talked a lot about happy guys and sad guys, we have been drawing a lot, and juggled a lot with feelings. And I do think it has been useful, to be able to express yourself in a new way.”
Theme 5 Examples: Opinions & suggestions concerning the CPP method – more talking and parental time

- “There should be some more space for the parent. Because it is a joint thing that we do. And sometimes I need to wait for, like, three days before the therapist is available to talk on the phone.”

- “Well, what I may have missed . . . he is very young, though! But maybe, we could have penetrated some things more thoroughly and talked even more with him about some of the things that are very hard in our family.”
Examples Theme 6: Barriers of legislation, responsibility, and violence

- “We were not able to get in touch with the father for consent. We tried for a long time in every way. And when we finally did, he did not wish to give his consent to treatment.”

- “The father does not wish to contribute to this at all. He thinks, therapy—this is crap! So, he might have thwarted the whole thing, as the child meets with him every second weekend.”

- “I was insecure about how to speak about her father. How to word what had happened. I was like, is this okay, to talk about the violence, what he did—like this?”