

Original Research Article

Open Access

Beyond quality time: evaluating an intervention for Emotional Availability in working families



Bojjagani Babitha^{*1}, Prema Patil², and Lata Pujar³,

¹Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Community Science, Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University, Lam, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, India

²Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Community Science, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad - 580005 Karnataka, India

³Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Community Science, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad - 580005 Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

The demanding nature of modern work often depletes the emotional resources of working parents, potentially compromising the quality of parent-child interactions. This study evaluates the efficacy of a targeted intervention designed to improve emotional availability (EA), the capacity for responsive and attuned connections in working families. Utilizing a pre-post design with a control group, participants engaged in a program focused on mindfulness and attunement skills. 30 families were selected by purposive sampling technique. The Emotional Availability was assessed for both father and mother by using Emotional Availability scale developed by Lum in 2005. The intervention study was carried out in Bapatla district of Bapatla mandala. Results indicate a significant increase in parental Emotional Availability, demonstrating the intervention's effectiveness in strengthening parent-child relationships beyond the concept of mere "quality time."

Keywords: Emotional Availability, Intervention, Quality time, parent-child relationship, mindfulness.

INTRODUCTION

The "working family" has become the most common family structure in the twenty-first century due to the sharp increase in dual-income and single-parent homes [1]. Significant economic and social gains have resulted from this change, but it has also made it more difficult to strike a balance between work commitments and the needs of attentive, caring parenting. Given this, the well-meaning idea of "quality time" has become a widely accepted cultural prescription, promoting concentrated, time-bound parent-child engagement to make up for fewer hours spent together overall [2]. A rising corpus of research in developmental psychology, however, indicates that this idea might not be enough. The continuous, moment-to-moment emotional connections that take place during both routine and focused contacts have a major impact on a child's growth, which is not only nourished in planned blocks of time [3]. The concept of emotional availability (EA) effectively describes this nuanced yet crucial element of the parent-child bond.

The ability of a dyad to enjoy a healthy, responsive, and attuned relationship and share an emotional connection is known as emotional availability [4]. It includes both the child's capacity to use the parent as a safe place for exploration (responsiveness, engagement) and the parent's capacity to recognize, understand, and react suitably to the child's emotional cues (sensitivity, structure, non-intrusiveness, non-hostility) [5].

Stronger cognitive abilities, improved social competence, stable attachment, and improved emotional control are all strongly predicted by high parental Emotional Availability [6, 7]. On the other hand, a higher likelihood of internalizing and externalizing behavioral issues is associated with lower levels of Emotional Availability [8].

Despite their best efforts, working parents frequently have particular difficulties in sustaining high Emotional Availability. The emotional resources required for sensitive and perceptive relationships might be depleted by ongoing time constraints, work-related stress, exhaustion, and the ongoing negotiation of work-life boundaries [9, 10]. Despite being physically present during the allotted "quality time," a parent may be psychologically distracted by work-related obligations, which could result in missed cues, diminished sensitivity, and more hostile or invasive interactions. This condition of being "physically present but emotionally absent" emphasizes the drawbacks of putting scheduled time ahead of genuine connections and the necessity of support that goes beyond straightforward guidance.

Evidence-based therapies created especially to improve working parents' emotional availability are therefore desperately needed. These kinds of interventions need to go beyond prescribed ideas of "quality time" and instead give parents practical tools to enhance the emotional content of every connection, from bedtime rituals to shared meals. These programs can help parents better transition from their professional duties to their parenting roles and interact with their children in a more present and connected way by emphasizing mindfulness, emotional regulation, and attunement approaches [11].

*Corresponding Author: Bojjagani Babitha

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21276/AATCCReview.2025.13.04.450>

© 2025 by the authors. The license of AATCC Review. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

This study aims to evaluate the efficacy of a targeted intervention program designed to improve the Emotional Availability of working parents. It is hypothesized that parents who participate in the intervention will demonstrate a significant increase in emotionally available interactions with their children compared to a waitlist control group.

METHODOLOGY

The intervention study was carried out in Bapatla district of Andhra Pradesh. Utilizing a pre-post design with a control group, participants engaged in a program focused on mindfulness and attunement skills. A total of 30 families were selected by purposive sampling technique. The Emotional Availability was assessed for both father and mother by using Emotional Availability scale developed by Lum in 2005. Data was collected through interview method before and after the intervention. Data was analysed through frequency, percentage, t-test.

Intervention programme consisting of ten sessions (To promote better emotional availability among parents) with each session focusing on one issue related to emotional availability of parents. Each session was planned for duration of two hours. Every session included information dissemination in the form of lectures, power point presentation and activities to make the parents realize the importance of emotional availability and its impact on children. The programme was developed in such a way that most of the issues related to emotional availability were addressed with the aim to enhance the better emotional availability among working parents.

The programme was delivered in the regional language. Such of the 30 parents whose children scored less in emotional availability were invited for the programme. Their consent to attend all the sessions was taken. The sessions were conducted in counselling center and some were through online (ZOOM Meeting) to facilitate easy participation. The sessions were conducted weekly once and for the duration of two hours in a day based on parents' convenience. Most of the parents attended all the sessions but some of them were irregular with the completion of at least five sessions out of ten sessions.

The intervention package entitled "Intervention module to promote better emotional availability among parents" consisted of ten sessions. The sessions and the issues addressed in each session are as below:

Session I: Importance of emotional availability of parents

The session began with self-introduction of the researcher and the purpose of the intervention was explained to the participants. The session focused on importance of emotional availability, which focused on secure attachment, emotional regulation, positive self-esteem, social skills, academic success, mental health, resilience, and long-term relationship satisfaction.

Session II: Importance of emotional availability of parents

Second session was in continuation of first session which addressed the issues related to challenges faced by children due to lack of parents availability, reasons for not being emotionally available to their children and one activity was arranged for both parents and children to spend time with each other.

Session III: Quality time

The session began with the concept of quality time spent by parents with their children. It focused on advantages of spending quality time with children and disadvantages of not spending quality time which is leading to issues like depression, anxiety, fear, insecurity and bad habits among children. The tips for spending quality time with children for parents was given.

Session III: Importance of communication in parent-child relationship

The session began with the concept of parent-child communication and focused on barriers and ways of parent - child communication.

Session IV: Socio-emotional competency

The session began with the concept of socio-emotional competency, self-awareness, social- awareness, self-management, relationship management and responsible decision making.

Session V: Socio-emotional competency

The session addresses the issues where child is facing due to lack of parent's emotional availability and importance of parent's role in child's socio-emotional competency.

Session VI: Behavioral problems

The session deals with the concept of behavioral problems faced by children, causes of behavioral problems like anxious, depression, somatic complaints, social problems, thought problems, rule-breaking behavior, attention problems, aggressive behavior and other problems.

Session VII: Behavioral problems

The session included information related to internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems, factors affecting behavioral problems, treatments and therapies to control behavioral problems.

Session IX: Strategies for improving emotional availability of parents

This session consisted of strategies for improving emotional availability of parents like spending quality time, listening, showing interest, watching TV together, helping in doing home works, eating together, playing with them, spending leisure time activities together etc.

Session X: Tips for positive parenting

This session focuses on tips of positive parenting for parents. The session consisted of a brief summary of all the topics dealt during earlier sessions by highlighting only important points on emotional availability. It comprised of group questions and the participants were also asked to write down feedback/ experience and opinion regarding the intervention programme. This was followed by post- test of emotional availability of parents by children.

RESULTS

Table 1: Association of levels of emotional availability of working parents between intervention group and control group N=30

		Emotional availability	Levels	Pretest	Post-test	(x2)
Intervention group (n=30)	Father	High	-	07 (46.64)		9.13**
		Low	15 (100.00)	08 (53.33)		
		Total	15 (100.00)	15 (100.00)		
	Mother	High	-	06 (33.34)		7.50**
		Low	15 (100.00)	09 (66.66)		
		Total	15 (100.00)	15 (100.00)		
Control group (n=30)	Father	High	-	01 (6.67)		1.03NS
		Low	15 (100.00)	14 (93.33)		
		Total	15 (100.00)	15 (100.00)		
	Mother	High	-	03 (20.00)		2.14NS
		Low	15 (100.00)	12 (80.00)		
		Total	15 (100.00)	15 (100.00)		

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage, **Significant at 1 per cent level, *Significant at 5 per cent level, NS-Non-significant

The table 1 shows the association of levels of emotional availability of working parents between intervention group and control group. With respect to both fathers and mothers emotional availability in intervention group, cent per cent (100.00 %) were in low during pretest, after 10 sessions, 46.64 per cent of fathers were high in emotional availability and 53.33 per cent were low in emotional availability. Whereas, 33.34 per cent of mothers were high in emotional availability and 66.66 per cent were low in emotional availability after post-test. Further, significant association was found between parent's emotional availability and intervention group.

With respect to both fathers and mothers emotional availability in control group, cent per cent of them were in low during pretest, after 10 sessions, only 6.67 per cent of fathers were high in emotional availability and majority (93.33 %) were low in emotional availability. Whereas, 20.00 per cent of mothers were high in emotional availability and majority (80.00 %) were low in emotional availability after post-test. Further, non-significant association was found between parent's emotional availability and control group.

Table 2: Comparison of mean scores of emotional availability of working parents between intervention group and control group N=30

Emotional availability	Intervention group			Control group		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Paired T-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Paired T-test
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD		Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	
Father	39.46 ± 5.56	45.66 ± 1.11	4.41**	29.13 ± 6.84	29.20 ± 7.00	1.00NS
Mother	39.20 ± 5.57	43.93 ± 2.86	4.79**	35.93 ± 6.46	36.06 ± 6.65	0.06NS

**Significant at 1 per cent level of probability, *Significant at 5 per cent level of probability, NS- Non-significant

The result of table 2 shows the comparison of mean scores of emotional availability of working parents between intervention group and control group. Paired t-test shows the highly significant ($t = 4.41^{**}$) mean difference was found in fathers emotional availability with pre-test scores ($M = 39.46$) and post-test scores ($M = 45.66$) in intervention group. However, a non-significant ($t = 1.00^{NS}$) difference was observed in control group between pre-test scores ($M = 29.13$) and post-test scores ($M = 29.20$) in control group with respect to fathers emotional availability. Further, significant ($t = 4.79^{**}$) mean difference was found in mothers emotional availability with pre-test score ($M = 39.20$) and post-test score ($M = 43.93$) in intervention group. However, a non-significant ($t = 0.06^{NS}$) difference was observed in control group between pre-test scores ($M = 35.93$) and post-test scores ($M = 36.06$) in control group with respect to mothers emotional availability.

N=30

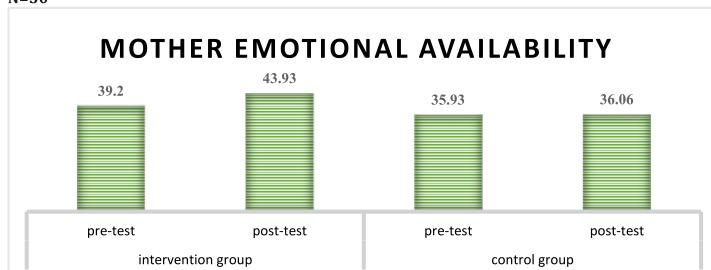


Figure 1. Mean scores of mother's emotional availability between intervention group and control group

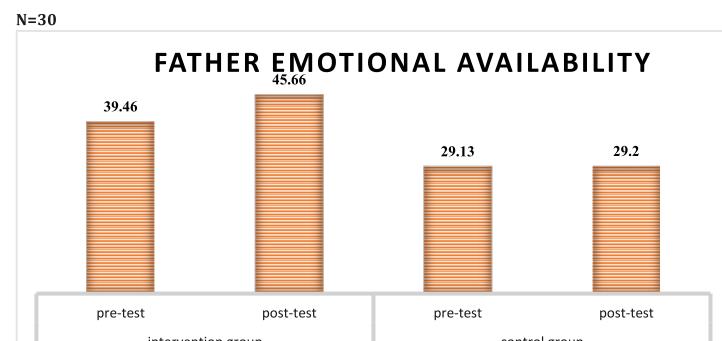


Figure 2. Mean scores of father's emotional availability between intervention group and control group

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that a targeted intervention program was significantly effective and enhance the emotional availability (EA) of working parents, thereby strengthening the emotional quality of their interactions with their children. The findings move beyond the simplistic notion of "quality time" by providing empirical evidence that parents can be equipped with practical skills to become more attuned, sensitive, and less hostile, even within the constraints of busy schedules. The significant improvements observed across key EA dimensions suggest that the intervention successfully addressed core barriers such as work-related stress and emotional depletion, facilitating a more mindful and present parenting approach.

References

1. Pew Research Center. (2015). *Parenting in America*. Washington, DC.
2. Allen, T. D., & Finkelstein, L. M. (2014). Work-family conflict among members of full-time dual-earner couples: An examination of family life stage, gender, and age. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 19(3), 376-384.
3. Bögels, S. M., Lehtonen, A., & Restifo, K. (2010). Mindful Parenting in Mental Health Care. *Mindfulness*, 1(2), 107-120.
4. Daly, K. J. (2001). Deconstructing Family Time: From Ideology to Lived Experience. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(2), 283-294.
5. Fiese, B. H., et al. (2002). A Review of 50 Years of Research on Naturally Occurring Family Routines and Rituals: Cause for Celebration? *Journal of Family Psychology*, 16(4), 381-390.
6. Emde, R. N. (1980). Emotional Availability: A Reciprocal Reward System for Infants and Parents with Implications for Prevention of Psychosocial Disorders. In P. M. Taylor (Ed.), *Parent-Infant Relationships* (pp. 87-115). Grune & Stratton.
7. Biringen, Z., & Easterbrooks, M. A. (2012). Emotional Availability: Concept, research, and window on developmental psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology*, 24(1), 1-8.
8. Easterbrooks, M. A., & Biringen, Z. (2000). Mapping the terrain of emotional availability and attachment. *Attachment & Human Development*, 2(2), 129-135.
9. Bornstein, M. H. (2002). Parenting infants. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Children and parenting* (pp. 3-43). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
10. Little, C., & Carter, A. S. (2005). Negative emotional reactivity and regulation in 12-month-olds following emotional challenge: Contributions of maternal-infant emotional availability in a low-income sample. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 26(4), 354-368.
11. Repetti, R. L., & Wang, S. W. (2010). The Effects of Job Stress on the Family: One Size Does Not Fit All. In D. R. Crane & E. J. Hill (Eds.), *Handbook of Families and Work: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (pp. 119-141). University Press of America.