
Caring Dads: Safer Children

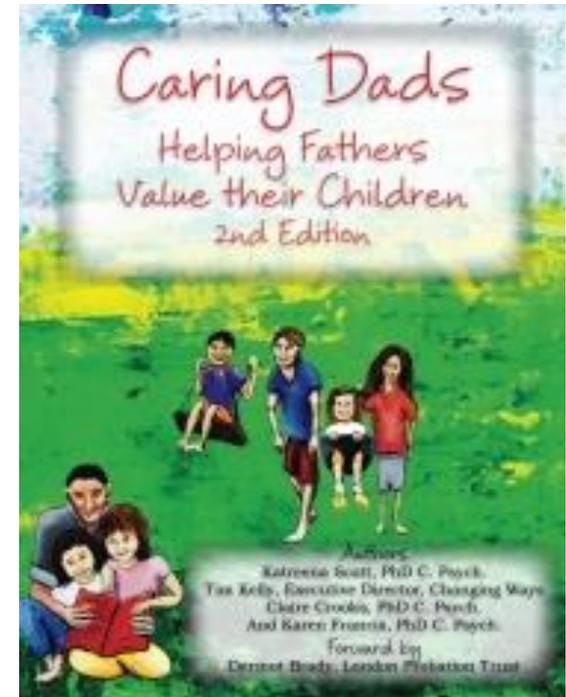
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**Respect's National
Practitioner Network
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Caring Dads programme

- Group work programme
- Originates from Canada
- Fathers attend for 17 weeks
- Weekly 2 hour sessions
- Two group facilitators
- Partners and children contact
- Co-ordinated case management



"Caring Dads is devoted to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children through working with fathers who have abused and neglected their children or exposed them to abuse of their mothers."

Intended outcomes

According to interviews with NSPCC practitioners..

Parenting

Father becomes a more confident child centred parent

Better communication between father and child

Father is a positive influence in the child's life

Co-parenting

Supportive of child's mother

Father stops minimising previous behaviour

Safer separation of parents

Reunifying families so father can fulfil fulltime fathering role

Father engaging positively with everyone important in his child's life

Father cooperating with court process or other professionals



Overview of CDSC evaluation

Mixed method evaluation:

- standardised measures
- face to face surveys
- qualitative interviews
- analysis of case records



Data collection time points:

T1 - Before entry to the programme

T2 - End of programme

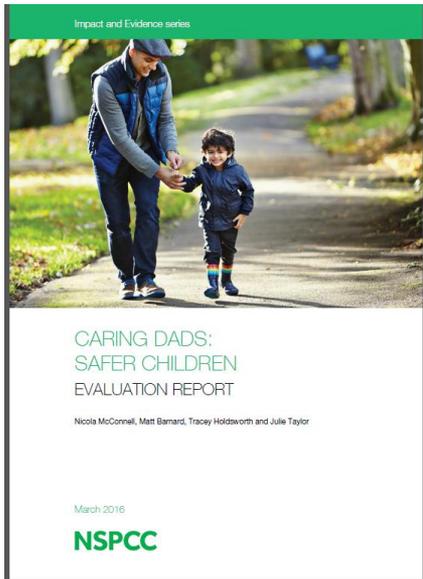
T3 - Follow up 6 to 12 months after end of programme

Ethics: REC, guidance, training, and ethics review

Limitations: Small comparison and child samples, fathers' self reports.

Summary of findings: evaluation

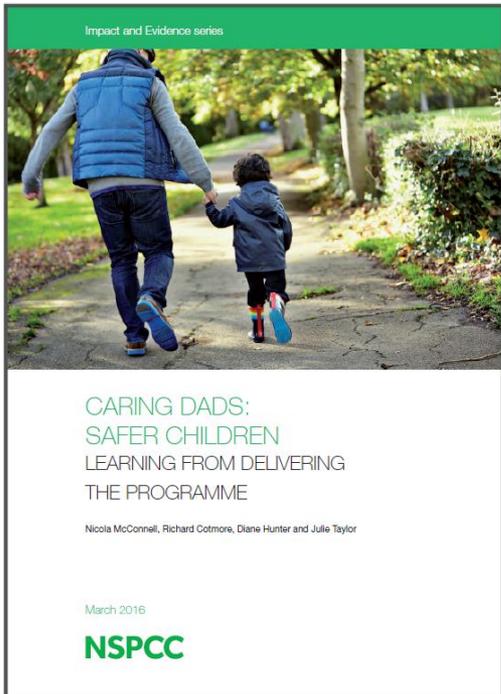
Promising evidence that CDSC can help to improve the welfare of children who have lived with domestic abuse.



- Fewer incidents of domestic abuse after completing the programme.
- Risks to children reduced because fathers generally found being a parent less stressful and interacted better with their children.
- Evidence of positive improvements in the fathers' behaviour (although some fathers did not change sufficiently despite completing the programme).
- Increased feelings of safety and wellbeing within families.
- CDSC practitioners influenced decisions made about children, either by providing evidence of changes in the father's behaviour or highlighting additional safeguarding concerns

Summary of findings: learning

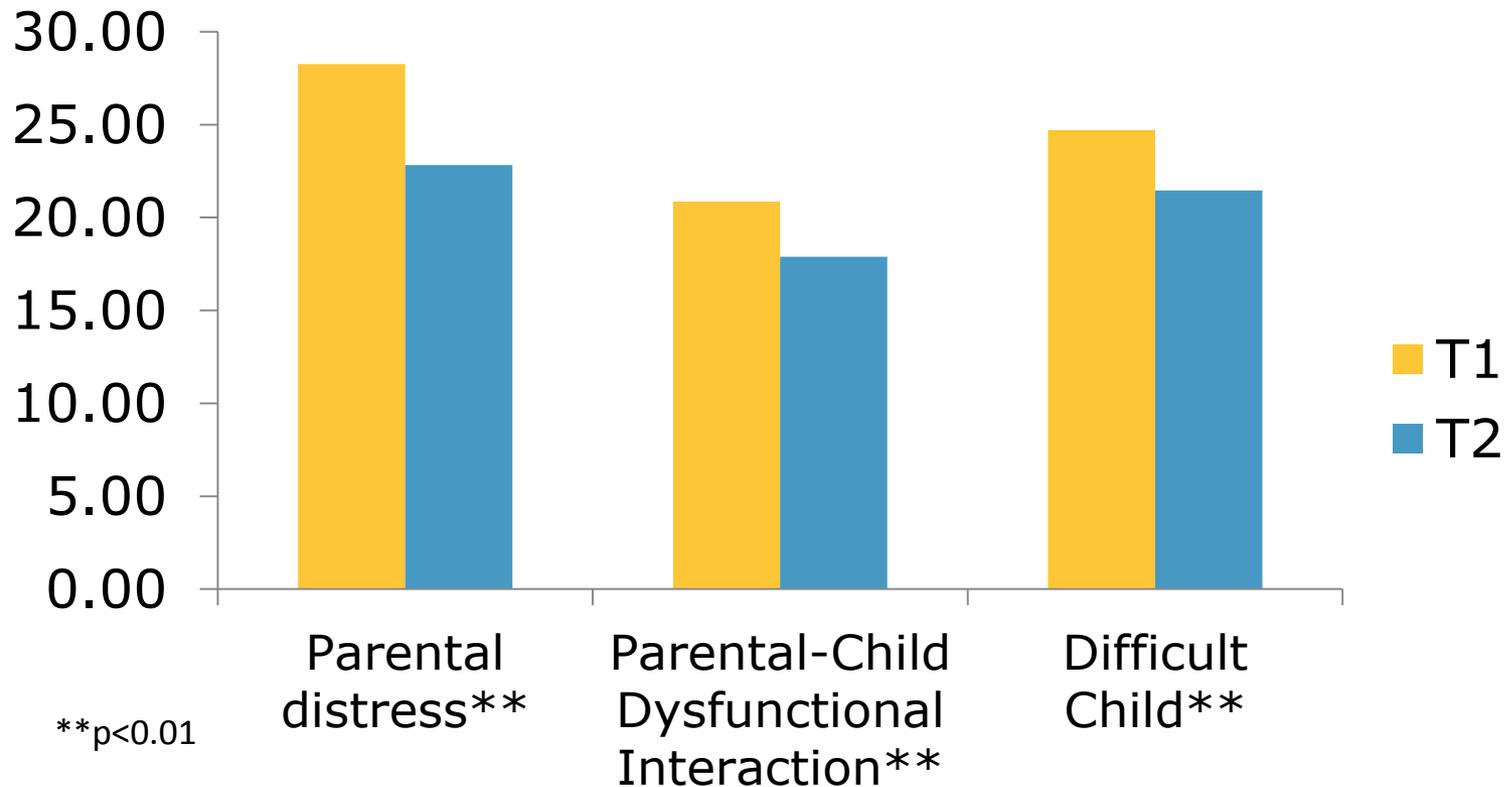
Key learning about engaging fathers, referrals, and the resources and skills required.



- Fathers' motivation is the focus on parenting and their relationship with their child.
- Patterns of referral and attrition.
- Advice on effective working with referrers.
- Time spent on different activities.
- Delivering CDSC is complex. Practitioners need the right level of skills and knowledge of domestic abuse and interagency working.
- Impact of context and location on delivery.

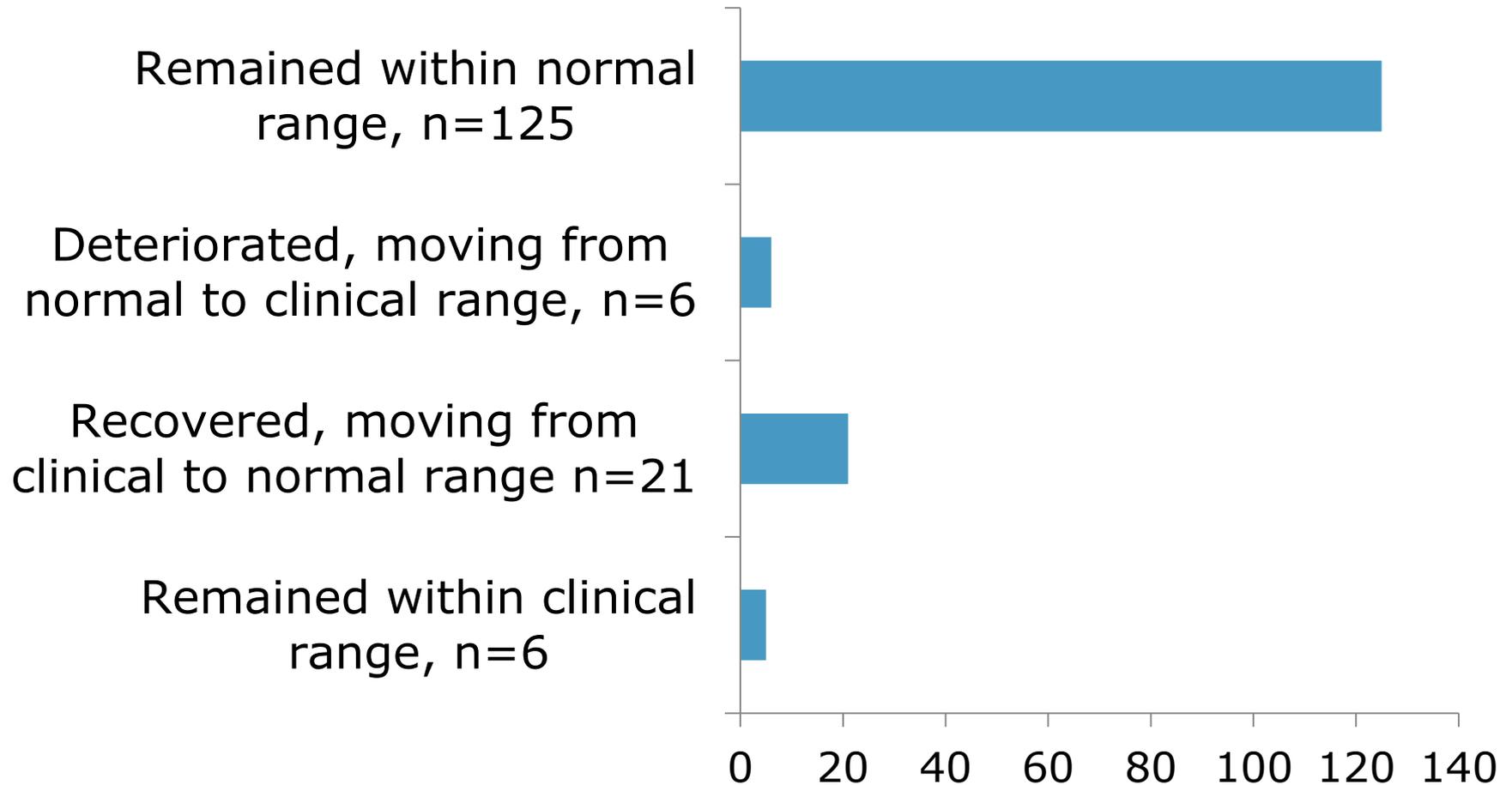
Fathers parenting stress

Average pre- and post-programme scores for fathers completing the Parenting Stress Index



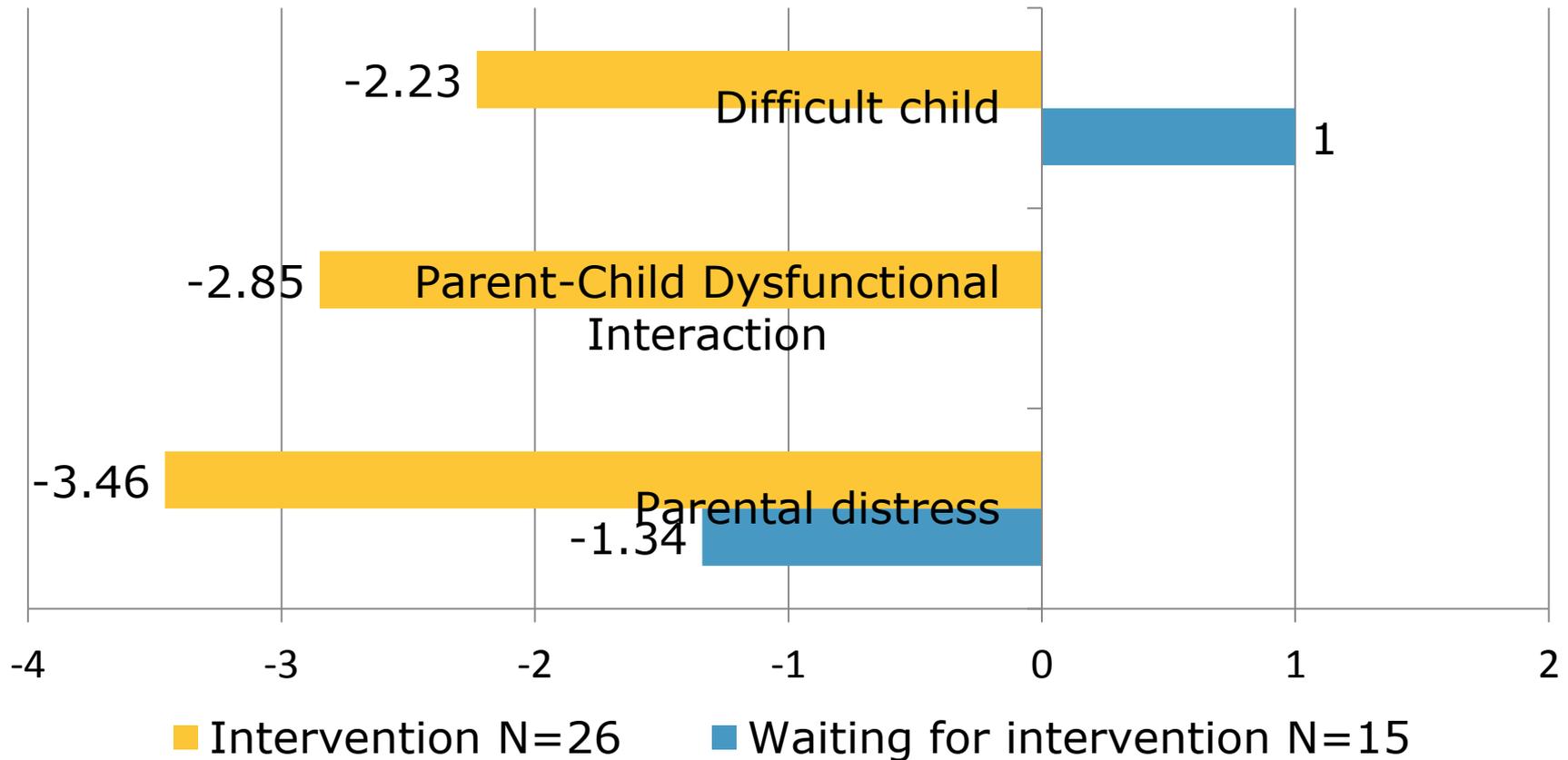
Fathers' parenting stress

Number of fathers moving between the normal and clinical ranges of the Parenting Stress Index when comparing pre- and post-programme scores



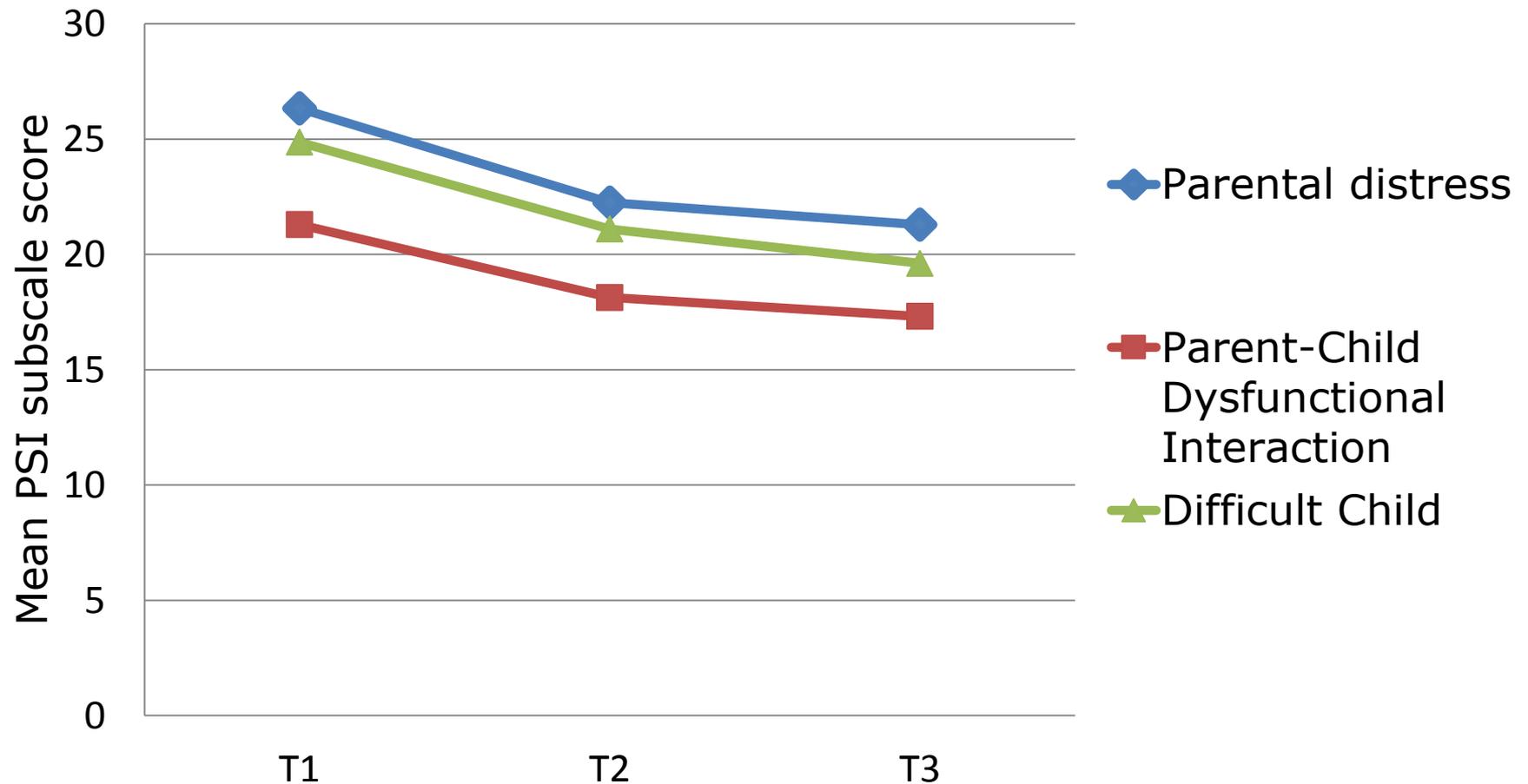
Comparison group

Change in mean scores for parenting stress index, comparing fathers who completed programme with fathers who were waiting to start.



Sustaining change: parenting stress

Fathers PSI subscale scores at each time point, N=52



Children and partners



Differing views and needs

Positive feelings about CDSC:

- Wanted father to attend for the sake of their/his child
- Recognised opportunity for him/them to get help
- Hoped programme would stop on-going abuse
- Expressed pride that he had decided to attend

Negative feelings about CDSC

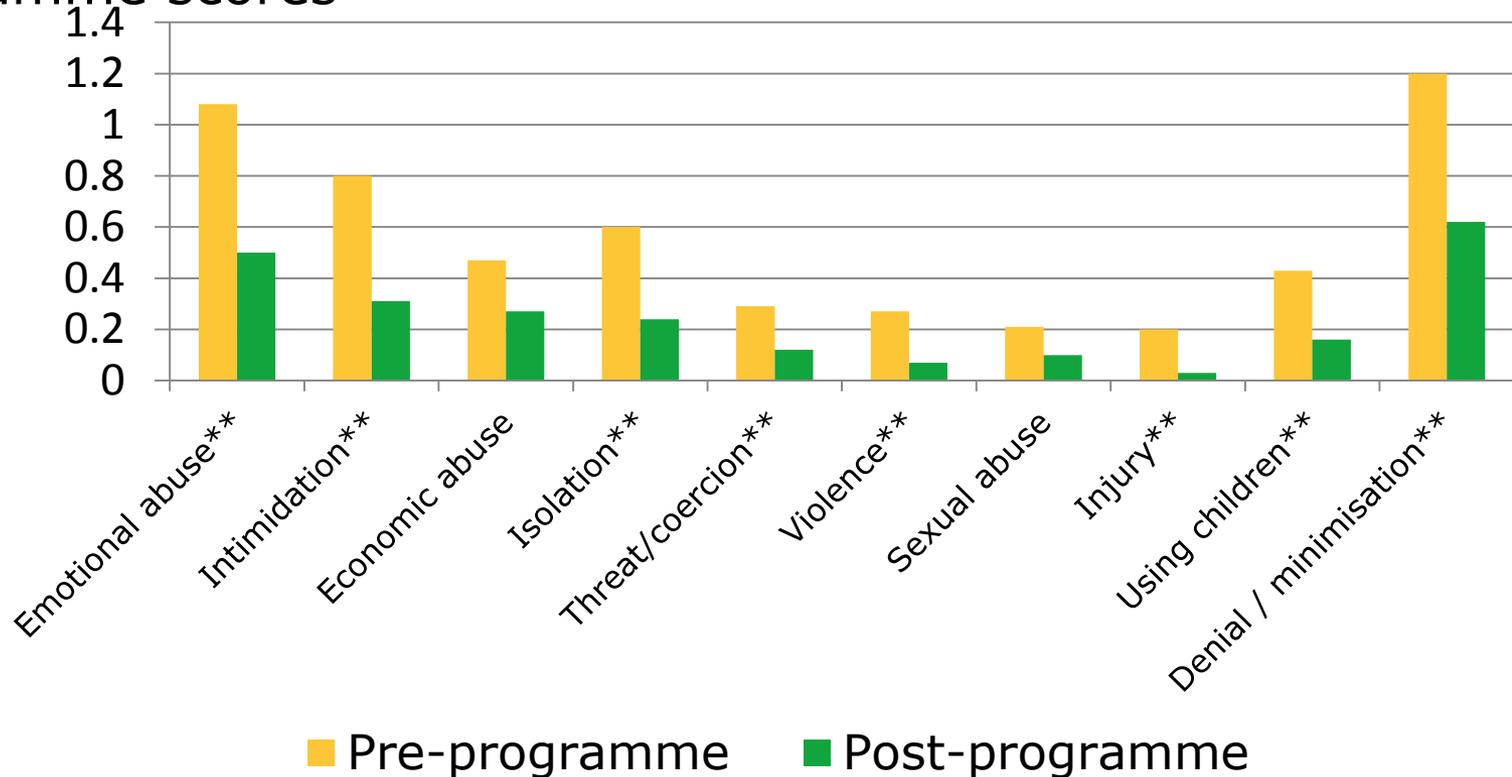
- Worried programme might make situation worse
- Perceived programme as intrusion or potential risk
- Believed father was deceiving social workers

CDSC could symbolise:

- A means to an end – less social services involvement
- A test for their relationship, a last chance
- An acknowledgement of the seriousness of the abuse

Controlling behaviour

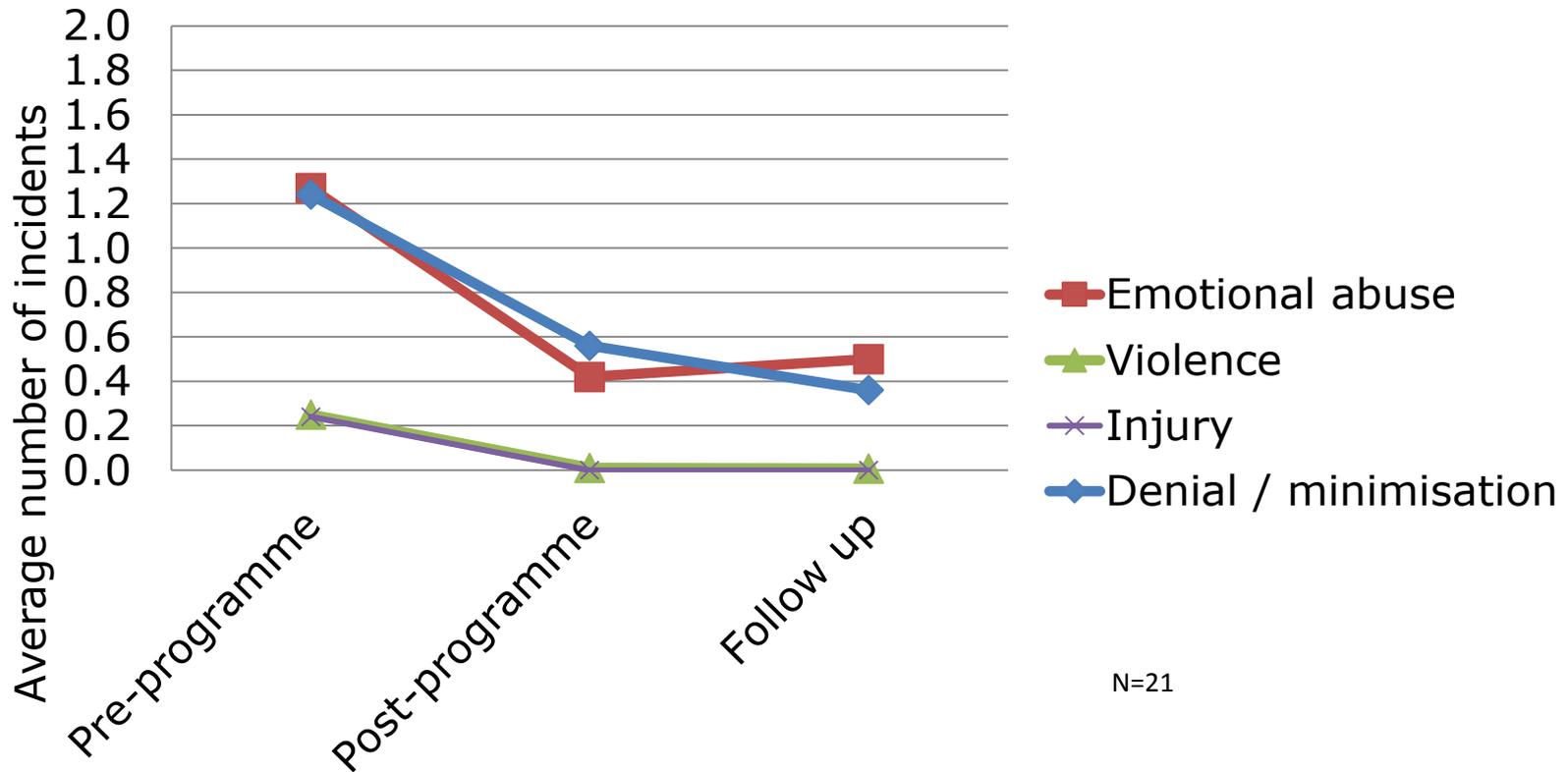
Average number of incidents reported by **partners** via the Controlling Behaviour Inventory, comparing pre- and post-programme scores



**p=<0.01

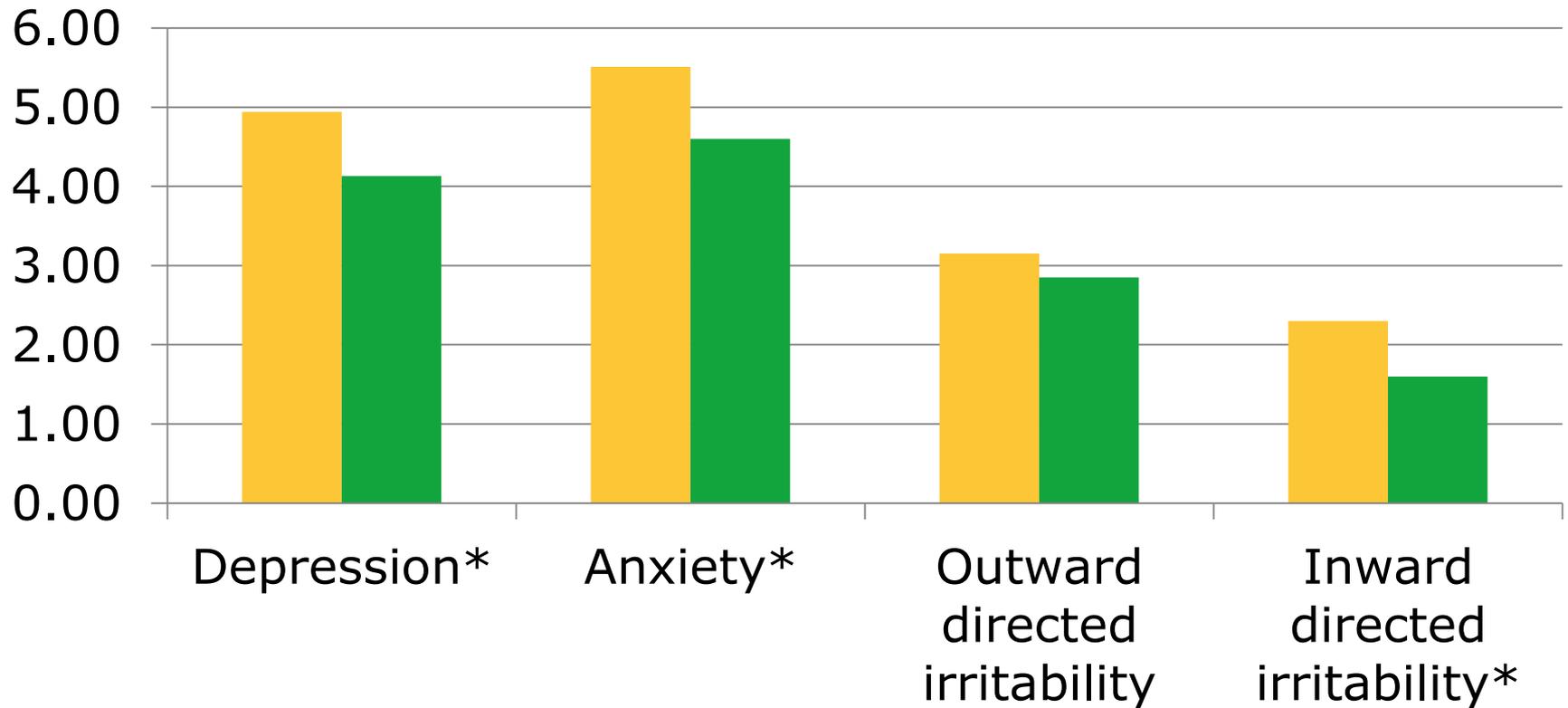
Follow up: controlling behaviour

Average number of incidents of controlling behaviour reported by **partners** at each time point.



Mothers' wellbeing

Average scores for responses to Adult Wellbeing Questionnaire, comparing pre- and post-programme scores



*p<0.05

■ Pre-programme

■ Post-programme

Source: CDSC teams October 2010 – October 2014

Children's understanding

Many children not aware of fathers attendance

- Babies or very young children
- Difficult to distinguish CDSC from other interventions
- Parents did not inform them or not appropriate for child at that time



Children who were aware:

- Recalled being told and described reasons why he was attending
 - Wanting/learning to be a better father
 - Abuse behaviours he needed to change
 - Required to “because social services forced him to”
- Showed interest in his homework about them
- Felt happy, ambivalent or had mixed feelings, e.g. guilt
- Articulated their hopes, e.g. having more contact with father and his family, father changing behaviour, father returning home

Positive changes: children

Children noticed that their father was changing in the following ways:

- Kinder, nicer
- Playing and doing more with them
- Easier to get on with, less moody
- Treating them appropriately for their age
- Listening and trying to understand them
- Shouting less
- Arguing less with their mother
- More interested in their school work



Positive changes: partners

Additionally partners also noticed he was:

- Calmer and more thoughtful
- Willing to talk through problems
- Insightful about his own behaviour
- Aware of the impact of domestic abuse
- Less likely to escalate arguments or be annoyed by others
- Able to apologise



With the children he was:

- More confident
- Giving more of his time
- More knowledgeable about what they needed
- Giving more praise
- More supportive of her

However..

Some partners could not comment (limited contact).

Some fathers did not change or did not change sufficiently:

- Still shouting or being threatening
- Unreliable, e.g. not turning up to agreed contact
- Still blaming others for circumstances created by his behaviour
- Criticising or undermining her parenting
- Expecting her to trust him too soon

Some fathers only partially or temporarily changed:

- Homework instigated false hopes that he might change
- Better with children but still trying to control partner
- Initially much better but starting to return to old behaviour

Outcomes recorded in case notes

When fathers demonstrated learning:

- Child removed from CP Register or Plan
- Frequency of contact increased
- Contact no longer supervised
- Maintenance of positive contact
- Father returned to family home
- Child returned to father's care



If not:

- Child remained on register, plan or in care
- No changes to supervised contact
- Recommended continued services involvement
- Safety planning
- Referrals to other services

Questions for group discussion

1. What further questions does the CDSC research prompt?
2. What insights can we share for those who wish to set up Caring Dads services in the future?
3. How does a focus on fathering contribute to efforts to end domestic abuse within families?
4. What does the joint statement between Respect and Caring Dads imply for the development of services in the UK?

Identifying themes

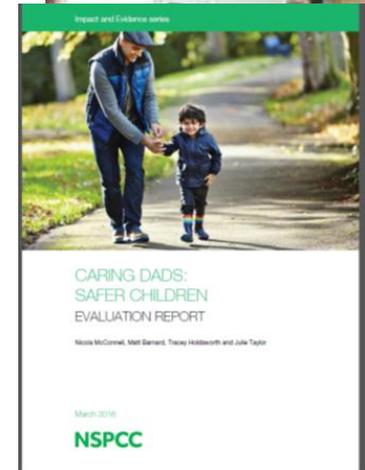
1. Group common issues together.
2. Summarise each common issue into broad themes.
3. Choose two themes to feedback to the group.

CDSC Publications

McConnell N. and Taylor J. (2014), Evaluating Programmes for Violent Fathers: Challenges and Ethical Review, *Child Abuse Rev.*, doi: 10.1002/car.2342

McConnell, N., Barnard M, Holdsworth T and Taylor J (2016) *Caring Dads: Safer Children: Evaluation Report*. NSPCC: London

McConnell, N., Cotmore, R., Hunter, D. and Taylor, J. (2016) *Caring Dads: Safer Children: Learning from delivering the programme*. NSPCC: London



www.nspcc.org.uk/evidencehub