



# IMPACT ON PARENTS OF A PREVENTIVE PROGRAM

## to develop and improve social skills IN CHILDREN FROM 2nd TO 5th GRADES

of elementary school

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### Introduction

Drug use among students has increased in Mexico over the past years (Villatoro, 2010). Likewise, many studies have shown that the age for consumption is starting before, pointing out the urge for implementing prevention interventions at earlier ages (Medina-Mora et al., 2003, Villatoro et al., 2003, 2010), that can help in the development of healthier habits, as well as the development of adequate skills in order to avoid risk behaviors such as drug use (Sáenz, 2001).

Many social skills training programs have shown their effectiveness regarding drug use prevention including alcohol, tobacco and drugs (Palinkas et al., 2003, 2010). Therefore, offering prevention alternatives at home and at school (Tello, 2005), particularly in preschool and elementary school, becomes necessary.

Specifically, school is a suitable place for health promotion, where kids are able to develop interpersonal aptitudes to be well socially adapted, for a good self esteem, a better assertiveness, school connectedness and an adequate stress control (ONUDD, 2006). This way, social skills turn out to be a useful psychological, social and scholar adjustment predictor (Valles et al., 1996). Likely, a critical and reflexive analysis regarding healthy lifestyles and living conditions is fostered by social skills in the prevention area, enabling better relationships with close people, especially with parents.

Within this context, the "Leaving Prints in your life" prevention program has shown its effectiveness in social skills development (Gutiérrez et al., 2011). In order to delve in the positive effects of the intervention, this paper's objective is to show the results of the intervention relating to the parents of those children who participated in the prevention program "Leaving Prints in your life".

### Method

"Leaving Prints in your life" is a prevention program that focuses on social skills among children from 2nd to 5th grade in elementary school, and its purpose is to diminish risk and problem behavior probabilities during adolescence and youth. Its task consists in working for an hour once a week during six months, approximately.

Its work relies mainly on a book containing social skills development and reinforcement activities, which are divided in four modules that include: planning goals, positive behavior, self esteem, assertiveness, trustful people, identifying pleasant and unpleasant sensations, different type of secrets, different types of abuse, family communication, school connectedness, tolerance regarding frustration, achievement motivation, self control, manage own emotions and relaxing, discrimination, self concept and identifying roles. Each module contains activities that are designed to be solved by children with their parents at home. The effectiveness of the program was measured by working with two schools with very similar academic structure and social-cultural characteristics. One of them was selected randomly to become the control school leaving the other one as the experimental school. An experimental design was used in order to test the intervention effects. The study was carried out with 362 children from 2nd to 5th grades of two elementary schools from Mexico City. Regarding to parents, the intervention program was shown to them when school started; explaining what it was about and what kind of work was going to be done with their children. They were also informed about the questionnaire to be solved by the principal caregiver, which parents themselves chose. Both schools were meant to receive the intervention at different moments according to ethic issues; however, measurements were made since the beginning in both schools in order to contrast children's evolution during the study period. Also, teacher evaluations were made in both schools so that the group's specific conducts could be observed, and the general school environment could be tested. Parent evaluations were made as well in order to find out about the perception they have about their children's social skills and conduct, and the rearing styles they use with them (Villatoro, 2006). A rally for children and their parents was made at the end of the program intervention.

### Results

Within all the children who participated in the prevention program, caregivers of only 40.1% of them answered the questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the intervention, from which the 72% corresponds to mothers, the 21.3% to fathers and the remaining was achieved by grandparents, siblings, aunts or uncles. The 47.3% were boys and 52.7% were girls. Most caregivers that participated belong to 3rd grade children pointing out a 54.7%, followed by 4th grade with 16.7%, then 5th grade with 15.3% and finally a 2nd grade 13.3%. The results that refer to the perception that parents have towards their children's social skills, show that at the start of the intervention, parents reported a high rate of antisocial behavior ( $\bar{x}=7.3$ ) and aggression ( $\bar{x}=6.7$ ).

On the contrary, at the end of the intervention they observed that these behaviors diminished significantly in their children ( $t=76.5$ ,  $p<=.001$  and  $t=41.1$ ,  $p<=.001$ , respectively) (Table 1). Regarding to communication skills, assertiveness and pro-social conduct, parents did not observe any differences in their children's behavior at the end of the prevention program.

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It was found by analyzing per sex the rearing practices employed for solving problems, that children suffered more physical, emotional and neglect mother abuse at the beginning of the intervention, while severe physical abuse was undertaken by fathers; girls suffer more mother abuse (Figure 1) whereas boys receive more father abuse (Figure 2), both concerning all types of abuse. Global results show that physical, severe physical and emotional abuse decreased at the end of the intervention program, but neglect and abandonment abuse rose. Furthermore, mothers reduced considerably their aggressive rearing practices at the end of the program intervention (Figure 1). Upbringing practices among mothers and fathers were analyzed separately in order to find possible differences between them, where statistic significant differences can be observed in physical abuse ( $\chi^2=12$ ,  $p<=.001$ ) and emotional abuse ( $\chi^2=12.1$ ,  $p<=.001$ ) among mothers (Table 2).

Table 1 Children's skills and behavior

	Pre $\bar{x}$	Post $\bar{x}$	t	p
Communication	6.094	5.992	.102	.919
Antisocial behavior	7.265	0.285	76.5	.000
Assertiveness	5.969	6.007	-.16	.873
Prosocial behavior	4.205	4.152	-.03	.978
Aggressiveness	6.723	0.688	41.1	.000

Table 2 Parent Upbringing Practices

	Pre		Post		$\chi^2$	p
	N	%	N	%		
Mother Physical Abuse	29	26.9	10	9.3	12.0	.001
Father Physical Abuse	5	15.6	3	9.4		
Mother Severe Physical Abuse	8	7.4	3	2.8		
Father Severe Physical Abuse	3	9.4	2	6.3		
Mother Emotional Abuse	71	65.7	50	46.3	12.1	.001
Father Emotional Abuse	20	62.5	17	53.1		
Mother Negligent Abuse	9	8.3	16	14.8		
Father Negligent Abuse	--	--	4	12.5		

Figure 1 Mother Upbringing Practices

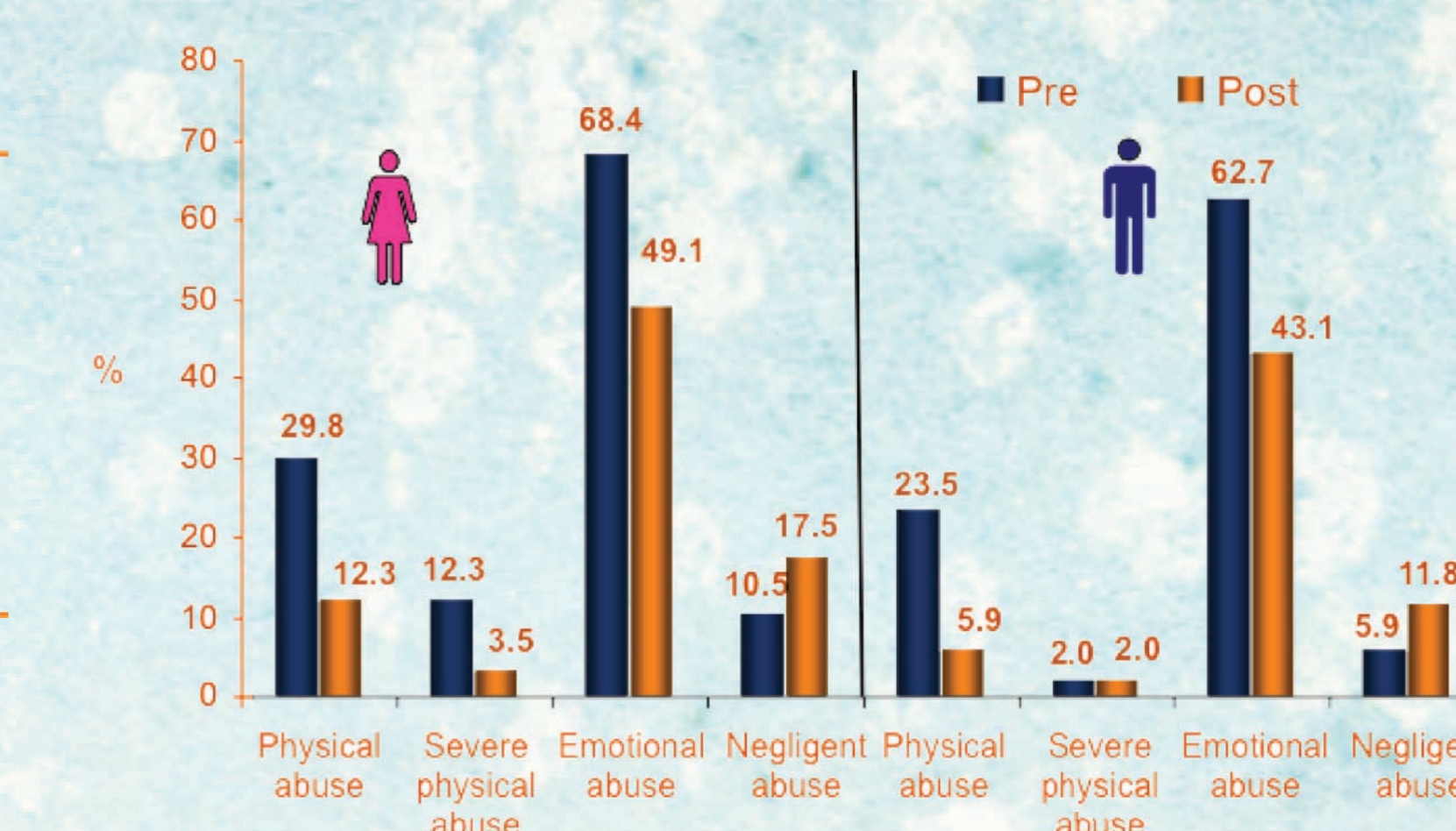
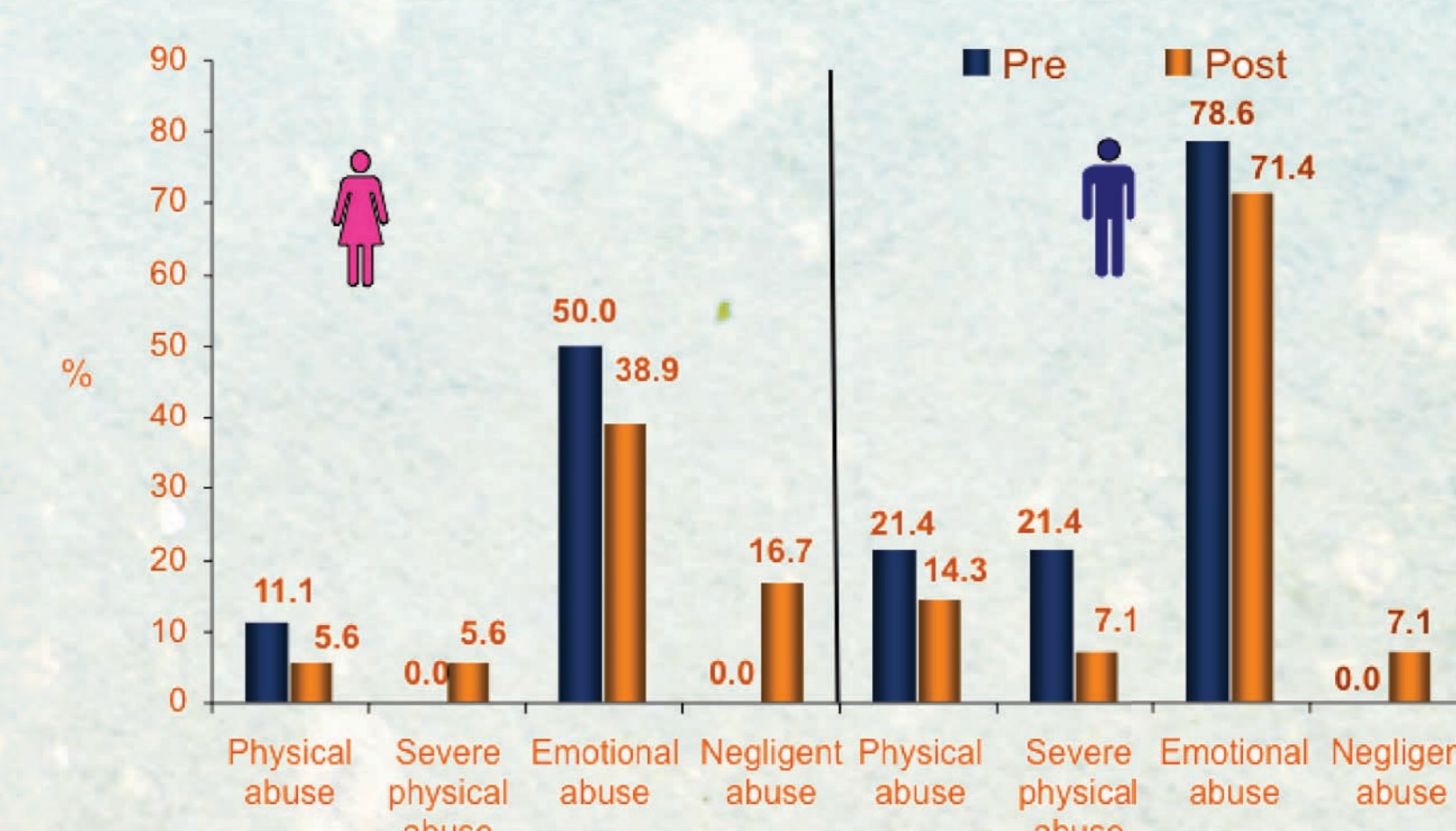


Figure 2 Father Upbringing Practices



### Conclusions

As we can observe, there is very poor family involvement in their children's school activities. This situation used to be common when kids passed from elementary to middle school (meaning adolescence) and nowadays it is also found in infancy communities, which makes it an important issue in need of attention, more specifically with parents who are the ones that participate the less (Sánchez, et al., 2010), given that some authors mention that parent's school involvement is a fine children academic performance indicator (Valdez, et al., 2009, Navarro, et al., 2001). Furthermore, 3rd grade turned out to be the one that participated the most because of the strategies employed by those grade teachers, strategies that made parents hand over the questionnaires they were given. Regarding to the perception parents have about their children's behavior and social skills, it can be observed that parents noticed an important decrease in antisocial and aggressive conducts; moreover, they didn't notice any changes in their pro social skills and behavior, instead, they reported a diminishment in some skills. Meanwhile, it was also found regarding upbringing practices for solving problems, that mothers where the ones who reported higher abuse rates, but they were also the ones who presented bigger changes at the end of the intervention in comparison to fathers. This change can be explained because they are more involved in their children's scholar issues, and therefore they can have a better approach to the proposals for problem solutions handled in the intervention. On the other hand, an increase in the negligence abuse was observed, which makes us believe this situation may obey to the fact that children assume more independence as they grow older. The analysis of these results marks that, besides providing children the necessary tools for a problematic behavior protection, social skills development also helps them establish a better relationship with their parents, which consequently makes parents reduce their aggressive upbringing practices.

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