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Dads Tuning in to Kids: A Randomized Controlled Trial of an Emotion Socialization Parenting Program for Fathers

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Abstract

Fathers play an important role in shaping their children's emotional competence although most literature has focused on the influence of mothers. *Dads Tuning in to Kids* (*Dads TIK*) is a parenting program that teaches fathers to coach their children in learning about emotions, while also helping fathers increase awareness and regulation of their own emotions. A randomized controlled efficacy trial of *Dads TIK* was conducted with a community sample of 162 fathers of a 4-year old child attending preschool in Melbourne, Australia. Those allocated to the intervention attended a 7-session manualized group program. Questionnaires were completed by fathers, the fathers' partners and the children's teachers at baseline and 6 month follow-up. Results were that fathers in the intervention condition but not control condition reported significant increases in emotional socialization, parenting satisfaction and efficacy, and reductions in their children's difficult behaviors. Partners of fathers in the intervention condition reported reductions in their own emotion dismissing parenting and improvements in psychological wellbeing. Partners and teachers reported significant improvements in children's behavior across both intervention and control conditions. These findings suggest a father-focused program appears to lead to changes in fathers' emotion socialization skills that may have benefits for partners' functioning and children's behavior.

Keywords: emotion socialization, fathers, parenting program, preschool children, prevention

Dads Tuning in to Kids: A Randomized Controlled Trial of an Emotion Socialization Parenting Program for Fathers

Children's abilities to understand and manage their expression of emotions (emotional competence) are critical skills that begin developing prior to starting school and have important benefits for social and behavioral functioning. Mothers and fathers both play a central role in shaping children's emotional competence, and prevention efforts are beginning to target these aspects of children's learning via parenting or early childhood/school based programs. Parenting interventions have begun to teach optimal emotion socialization, namely how parents manage their own emotions and how they respond to their children's emotions to facilitate emotional competence. One example of a program that teaches parents skills in emotion socialization is Tuning in to Kids® (TIK) (Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, Prior, & Kehoe, 2010). TIK program is an emotion-focused group-parenting program, efficacious in improving parents' emotion socialization and child emotional competence, and reducing parent mental health difficulties and child behavior problems (Duncombe et al., 2016; Havighurst et al., 2013; Havighurst et al., 2010). Trials of TIK have targeted the child's primary caregiver, usually the mother. Emotion socialization research has highlighted the important role of fathers in helping children learn emotional competence (i.e., Brown, Craig, & Halberstadt, 2015; van der Pol et al., 2015), however, it is not yet known what the benefits will be if fathers participate in emotion socialization interventions. This study used a randomized controlled design to test a modified father-specific version of TIK with fathers of preschool children. Outcomes were examined at 6-months follow-up to see whether the intervention improved father's emotion socialization practices as well as partner functioning and child behavior.

Theoretical Background

At the preschool age, children are learning critical skills in being able to understand and manage their emotions also known as emotional competence (Denham, 1998). These skills help them to focus attention for learning, have healthy social relationships, manage emotional challenges and respond adaptively to transition and change. While children's emotional competence is in part due to their temperament, it is well established that parents play a key role in helping children develop these skills (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998; Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007). When parents model balanced and effective emotional awareness/regulation, have supportive reactions to their children's emotions, and engage in

discussions that assist children with opportunities to process and understand emotions, this assists children to learn skills in emotion regulation (e.g., Morris et al., 2007). Parental reactions and discussion around children's emotions that includes scaffolding the child's emotional understanding and regulation has been labeled emotion coaching (Gottman, Fainsilber-Katz, & Hooven, 1996) and has been found to be related to children developing better knowledge about and regulation of their emotions as well as fewer behavior problems (van der Pol et al., 2016). Conversely, emotionally dismissive parenting is characterized by non-acceptance of children's emotions and responses that discourage, punish or avoid emotions and is associated with poorer emotion understanding and regulation in children and more behavior problems (Morris et al., 2007). The growing body of literature supporting these ideas has predominantly established these relationships with mothers, although in recent years research investigating the role of fathers' emotion socialization has demonstrated a similar impact on children's emotional and behavioral functioning (e.g., Cassano, Perry-Parrish, & Zeman, 2007; van der Pol et al., 2015).

There are, however, some differences between fathers and mothers in terms of emotion socialization. Gottman and colleagues (1996) in their longitudinal study of parents of preschoolers found that fathers were less expressive of emotions, were less likely to use emotion coaching and were more likely to be emotionally dismissive. Other research has also found fathers to be less supportive and more minimizing or critical in response to children's emotions than mothers (Cassano et al., 2007; Nelson, O'Brien, Blankson, Calkins, & Keane, 2009; Wong, McElwain, & Halberstadt, 2009). In addition, fathers tend to be less expressive of their own emotions (Brody, 2000; Dunsmore, Her, Halberstadt, & Perez-Rivera, 2009; Halberstadt, Cassidy, Stifter, Parke, & Fox, 1995; Wong et al., 2009) and feel greater discomfort with children's emotion expression (Dunsmore et al., 2009). Fathers are also less likely to engage in discussion about emotions with their children (Brody, 2000; Zaman & Fivush, 2013) and men have been found to have poorer skills in decoding the emotions of others (Hoffmann, Kessler, Eppel, Rukavina, & Traue, 2010). Lastly, fathers have been found to be more likely than mothers to engage in gender stereotyped responses to emotions in girls and boys, encouraging greater expression of sadness and fear in girls than boys but encouraging less anger in girls (e.g., Chaplin, Cole, & Zahn-Waxler, 2005; Garside & Klimes-Dougan, 2002).

While fathers may be less likely to directly talk about emotions with children, they engage in other socializing processes that indirectly contribute to children's emotional

competence. Greater father involvement and confidence in parenting has been found to be associated with children's self-regulation, empathy, self-esteem, prosocial behavior and academic performance (Lamb & Lewis, 2010). In particular when fathers are involved in the preschool years, this contributes longitudinally to better child executive functioning (Meuwissen & Carlson, 2015) and fathers who read more with their children have children with better language/cognitive skills (Baker, Vernon-Feagans, & Investigators, 2015) – all central skills underpinning emotion competence (Denham, 1998). Fathers are also more likely to engage in play with their children that is rough-and-tumble, unpredictable and emotionally arousing than mothers (Fitzgerald, McKelvey, Schiffman, & Montanez, 2006; Parke & Mc Dowell, 1998); this plays an important role in helping children to learn to regulate high intensity emotions.

Fathers' responses to emotions may be due to the 'typical' roles fathers play in raising children. Traditional roles in Western countries are that men are the economic providers while women are the caregivers (Lamb & Lewis, 2010) and despite changes in recent decades, women mainly play the role of primary caregivers (Huerta et al., 2013). Fathers' roles as 'providers' mean they spend significantly less time with their children compared to mothers, with fewer opportunities for emotion discussion. In contrast, women in Western cultures are expected to be more nurturing and emotional in relationships (McIntyre & Edwards, 2009; Shields, 2013).

Efforts to enhance father involvement that increase emotionally responsive parenting include activities ranging from rough and tumble play through to time to read with children, and are likely to have important impacts on children's emotional competence. With changes in gender roles, and considerably greater involvement of men in parenting in many countries, there is an increasing need for fathers to develop parenting skills that strengthen relationships and facilitate the development of their children's emotional competence.

Parenting Interventions

A limited number of evidence-based parenting programs are available for fathers, with most published programs targeting fathers deemed at- risk, such as separated/divorced fathers, teen fathers and incarcerated fathers (Bronte-Tinkew, Burkhauser, & Metz, 2012). Evaluations of programs involving fathers have shown less father-uptake and lower impact on child outcomes when compared with mothers (Lundahl, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2006). This may be because when fathers are included in program evaluations the studies have used a general recruitment strategy versus father-only recruitment, or because the materials and delivery used are not tailored

specifically for fathers (Fletcher, 2001). Efforts to adapt programs to be suitable to fathers' work schedules and styles of learning are seen as essential in maximizing program uptake, retention and success (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2012; Lundahl et al., 2006) but are rarely reported.

For fathers and mothers, parenting programs targeting emotion socialization are beginning to emerge with some evidence demonstrating their impact (Salmon, 2009) but only one has included fathers in a clinical sample (Lafrance Robinson, Dolhanty, & Greenberg, 2015). Our own universal prevention program, *Tuning in to Kids*® (TIK: Havighurst et al., 2010) targets emotion socialization. Parents are taught to notice their beliefs and reactions to emotions, regulate their emotional expression and behavior, empathize with their child and learn emotion coaching. These aspects of parenting have been found to be theoretically and empirically associated with children's emotional competence. Considerable evidence of efficacy and effectiveness in randomized controlled trials has been found (i.e., Havighurst et al., 2013; Havighurst et al., 2010; Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2012), however, 90% of participating parents were mothers. Given fathers also play an important role in emotion socialization, the question remains as to whether TIK can improve fathers' emotion socialization practices and whether this will positively impact children's functioning. Emotion coaching, where fathers learn to notice, respond, empathize and reflect emotions are important interpersonal skills and so the program was also expected to positively impact other family relationships.

Given limitations in recruitment, attendance and application of skills taught in parenting programs by fathers, TIK was modified for a father-only audience. Men have been found to have some resistance to emotion coaching (Gottman et al., 1996) and have more difficulties identifying and regulating emotions (Levant, Hall, Williams, & Hasan, 2009). Therefore, Dads TIK, was structured into seven sessions providing more time to give information about the role of fathers in children's development and greater opportunity for learning the skills. A pilot study of Dads TIK with 43 fathers who all received the intervention was initially undertaken (Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2014). Subsequent to this, the program was refined and a randomized controlled trial conducted. Preliminary findings immediately post intervention were that fathers in the intervention reported significantly improved emotion socialization and child behavior (Wilson, Havighurst, Kehoe, & Harley, 2016), however, control data were not collected. The current study examines whether these changes were seen at 6-month follow up compared to controls and whether changes were reported by the father's partner and child's teacher.

Aims and Research Questions

The current study aimed to evaluate the efficacy of Dads TIK in a community sample of fathers of a 4-5 year old preschool child at 6-month follow-up enabling examination of whether changes reported in Wilson et al (2016) were seen over a longer follow-up period. Specific research questions tested were whether, in comparison to control participants, father's in the intervention condition would: improve in emotion socialization (increased emotion coaching and empathy, and decreased emotion dismissing); increase in parenting competence (increased parenting confidence, reduced hostile parenting); have partners who improved in their parenting and wellbeing; and have children with reduced behavioral difficulties.

Method

Participants

Participants were 162 fathers (mean age 40.59 years; range = 29.53 – 55.97, *SD* = 4.92) of a preschool child (boys = 53.70%; mean age 4.44 years; range = 3.05 - 6.34, *SD* = .65). The majority of fathers had more than one child (83.3%; range = 1-4 children), resided with their child and the child's mother (97.5%) or other father (one family) while three separated/divorced fathers lived part-time with their child. English was the main language spoken at home (95.7%), with 128 fathers (79.0%) born in Australia, and the remainder born in North America/New Zealand/the United Kingdom/Europe (22 fathers; 13.6%) or Asia/Africa/Middle East (12 fathers; 7.4%). High school completion rate was 90.7%, and most fathers reported completing a post-school qualification (none = 4.9%; certificate/trade = 10.5%; diploma = 9.3%; undergraduate degree = 43.2%; higher degree/diploma = 24.7%). The majority (97.5%) were currently employed, working an average of 41.76 hours per week (SD = 8.37) in mainly managerial or professional occupations (73.4%). A smaller number were employed as associate professionals (11.7%), tradespersons (4.3%) and clerical/sales/transport workers (8.7%). Few families were below the Australian poverty threshold of $AUD 49,972 per year for couples with two children (Melbourne institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, 2015). Five fathers (2.4%) reported low gross annual family income, 33 fathers (20.2%) reported middle-incomes ($60,000-99,999), and 124 (76.5%) reported higher incomes (>$100,000). In 2015-2016, the average household income for the state of Victoria was $107,000 (McCrindle, 2015).

Questionnaire measures were obtained from 146 partners (1 male, 145 female) and 135 preschool teachers. Partners were aged between 28 and 53 years (M_{age} = 38.9 years, *SD* = 4.5). The majority were Australian (73 %), had completed high school (84.7%), and had gone on to obtain post-school qualifications, including obtaining a certificate (6.1%), an advanced diploma (10.4%), a bachelor degree (30.7%), a graduate diploma (11%), and a postgraduate degree (25.8%). Seventeen partners (10.4%) did not report their qualifications.

Dads Tuning in to Kids Parenting Program

The seven-session adaptation of the original six-session TIK program teaches fathers to emotion coach and the benefits of their involvement in children's development and play. Teaching activities included watching DVD examples of emotion coaching and dismissing, handout materials, practice exercises, role-plays, and group discussion (see Wilson et al, 2016 for a detailed description). Role-plays were scaffolded so that fathers had structured support to start using the language of emotion coaching and examples were chosen that were more typical interactions for fathers. Throughout the program fathers were encouraged to find opportunities to connect and teach their children about emotions, such as via reading story books with their children as a "dad-friendly" way of scaffolding emotion discussions. The program was conducted in the evenings for seven weekly 2-hour sessions and a 2-hour booster session was offered approximately 8 weeks after program completion. A structured manual was used and fidelity checklists of all exercises/materials were completed by facilitators after each session; 100% of core (non-optional) content was delivered. Optional content was used as needed and included examples such as challenges with children eating.

Procedure

Preschools within a radius of 15 kilometers from The University of Melbourne (*n* = 34), plus six preschools in Geelong (the state of Victoria's largest regional city) were invited to participate; there were no refusals. Recruitment took place in waves across the 4-term preschool year, with programs conducted during terms 2 - 4 for the duration of the study (2012 - 2014). Participating preschools were provided with posters advertising the *Dads Tuning in to Kids* program, and a letter of invitation in a sealed envelope marked "To Dad" was distributed to families. Inclusion criteria were being the father of a 4-5 year old child enrolled in a preschool program and English language proficiency. Interested fathers contacted the researchers, who provided further information and obtained informed consent. Fathers were then mailed a baseline

questionnaire and their partner and their child's preschool teacher were also asked to complete questionnaires. Questionnaires included self-report scales for fathers' parenting, partners parenting and for father-, partner- and teacher-rated child behavior. Using a computer randomization program, preschools were randomized into intervention or waitlist control conditions based on uptake-rate (i.e., completed baseline questionnaires) and location. Intervention fathers (n = 87) were allocated to an immediate start program and Waitlist Control fathers (n = 75) were offered a 10-month delayed start program. A larger sample in the intervention condition may have been because intervention kindergartens were slightly larger in size. Fathers were excluded from the study if they did not complete baseline data before the specified cut-off date, or were unable to attend at least one of the first two program sessions. The study conformed to all University of Melbourne ethical requirements for research.

Intervention fathers attended one of eight programs (9 - 14 fathers per group). Accredited TIK facilitators (one male and one female) with Masters/PhD professional qualifications in Psychology, Social Work or Education and experience in the TIK program delivery facilitated the sessions. Programs were delivered at the researchers' on-site training venue or at an easily accessed community center or local library. Only one father (1.1%) dropped out of the program. A number of participants missed program sessions due to work commitments, pre-planned vacations or sick family members; they were provided (by email) with handout materials about sessions they were unable to attend. All seven program sessions were attended by 38 fathers (43.7%), 24 fathers (27.6%) attended six sessions, 14 fathers (16.1%) attended five, seven fathers (8.0%) attended four, and three fathers (3.4%) attended three sessions. Ten months post baseline (six months after completion of the 7th session of the program for Intervention participants), fathers, partners and teachers from both conditions were asked to complete follow-up questionnaires.

Measures

All questionnaires were administered at baseline and 10-months later (6-months after intervention participants completed the Dads TIK).

Parent Emotional Style Questionnaire (fathers and partners report on own parenting). The *Parent Emotional Style Questionnaire* (PESQ; Havighurst et al, 2010) is an adaptation of the *Maternal Emotional Style Questionnaire* (MESQ; Lagacé-Séguin & Coplan, 2005) and was used to measure parental beliefs about their child's sadness, anger and fear (rated on a 5 point scale).

The original measure has been reported by Lagacé-Séguin et al to have good reliability and validity. Five PESQ items were selected from the emotion coaching subscale to measure parents' empathy and emotional connection with their child (e.g., *when my child is scared, it's an opportunity for getting close; when my child is angry, I take some time to try to experience this feeling with him/her*) to create an Empathy scale (with higher scores indicating more empathy). Reliability was satisfactory as indicated by Cronbach's alphas of .73 (baseline) and .78 (6-month follow-up) for fathers, and for partners .75 (baseline) and .73 (6-month follow-up). Emotion dismissing beliefs were assessed with the 10-item Emotion Dismissing sub-scale from the PESQ (higher scores indicate more empathy). An example item is: *Childhood is a happy-go-lucky time, not a time for feeling sad or angry.* Cronbach's alphas were .79 at baseline and .85 at 6-month follow-up (for fathers) and .82 at baseline and .85 at 6-month follow-up (for partners).

The Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale (fathers only). The CCNES (Fabes, Eisenberg, & Bernzweig, 1990) measures emotion socialization practices. Parents rate on a 7-point response set how likely they are to respond to twelve scenarios of child negative emotions in one of six possible ways, each corresponding to a theoretically derived sub-scale. For example: *If my child loses some prized possession and reacts with tears, I would…*: Distress Reactions (DR): "*get upset with him/her for being so careless and then crying about it";* Minimization Reactions (MR): "*tell my child that he/she is over-reacting";* Punitive Reactions (PR): "*tell him/her that's what happens when you're not careful";* Expressive Encouragement (EE): "*tell him/her it's OK to cry when you feel unhappy";* Emotion-Focused Reactions (EFR): "*distract my child by talking about happy things";* Problem-Focused Reactions (PFR): "*help my child think of places he/she hasn't looked yet*". Good psychometric properties have been reported in terms of reliability and validity (Fabes, Poulin, Eisenberg, & Madden-Derdich, 2002), however, EFR and PFR subscales were excluded because we believe these do not encourage children's awareness and regulation of emotions: instead they distract the child from the emotion or encourage the parent to be solution oriented without first responding to the child's emotions. While Dads TIK teaches problem solving and strategies to assist children to manage emotions, this would always occur after the parent had first connected, empathized, named the emotion and given the child some space for the emotion to settle before a solution was considered. EFR and PFR do not capture this sequence of responding that are taught as part of Emotion Coaching, hence we have not included these subscales in this study. The Distress Reactions subscale was

also not included due to floor effects on the measure at baseline. The *Expressive Encouragement* (EE) subscale was selected to assess one aspect of supportive emotion socialization. Cronbach alphas for this scale were .90 at baseline and .92 at 6-month follow-up. *Minimization Reactions* (MR) and *Punitive Reactions* (PR) subscales were included to assess emotion dismissive socialization practices. These two subscales correlated at r = .66 (baseline) and .74 (6-month follow-up) and were summed into one total *Emotion Dismissing Practices* subscale with high Cronbach's alphas: .90 (baseline) and .92 (6-month follow-up).

Hostile Parenting (fathers only). Four items from a Hostile Parenting scale used in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (Growing up in Australia, 2017) were used to assess angry responses to difficult child behaviors. This measure has not been validated independently from the original measure. Fathers were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale how often in the previous 4 weeks, '*I have been angry with my child*', '*I have raised my voice with or shouted at my child'*, '*When my child cried, he/she got on my nerves'*, and '*I have lost my temper with my child*.' Items were summed (range 0-16) with higher scores indicating more hostile parenting. Cronbach's alphas for this scale were .84 at baseline and .84 at 6-month follow up.

Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (fathers only) (PSOC; Johnston & Mash, 1989) was used to measure two aspects of parents' self-reported competence in the parenting role: feelings of *Satisfaction* (e.g. '*Being a parent makes me tense and anxious'*) and *Efficacy* (e.g., '*Being a parent is manageable, and any problems are easily solved'*). This scale has demonstrated reliability and validity with Australian fathers (Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2009). Items are answered on a 6-point scale. Cronbach's alphas in the present sample were .81 and .80 for Satisfaction, and .83 and .85 for Efficacy at baseline and 6-month follow-up respectively.

The *Kessler Psychological Distress Scale* (K6; fathers and partners) (Kessler et al., 2003) was used to measure fathers' and partners' psychological distress (Ramchandani & Psychogiou, 2009). The K6 includes six questions about emotional state and has demonstrated excellent internal consistency and reliability as a measure of mental health. Respondents report how frequently in the previous four weeks they felt nervous, hopeless, restless, extremely sad, worthless, and that everything was an effort. Responses, ranging from 0 (*none of the time*) to 4 (*all of the time*), are summed with scores of 12 to 24 considered high risk for serious mood and anxiety disorders, whereas low scores indicate low levels of psychological distress. Cronbach's

alpha in the current sample of fathers was .79 at baseline and .82 at 6-month follow-up. Internal consistency of this scale was similar for partners: .78 at baseline and .81 at 6-month follow-up.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (fathers, partners and teachers) (SDQ; Goodman, 2001). This 25 item measure of child behavior problems has good psychometric properties, is widely used, and is considered suitable for community samples (Warnick, Bracken, & Kasl, 2008). Four sub-scales (*emotional symptoms, peer relationship problems, conduct problems and hyperactivity/inattention*) are combined to generate a *Total Difficulties* score, and a fifth subscale assesses *Prosocial behavior*. Cronbach alphas were .77 at baseline and .79 at 6-month follow-up for Total Difficulties for fathers, and .82 (baseline) and .85 (6-month follow-up) for partners. Reliability of the Prosocial scale was lower but adequate: .65 and .67 at baseline and .70 and .74 at 6-month follow-up, for fathers and partners respectively. For teachers, the Total difficulties scale showed good reliability at baseline (.82) and 6-month follow-up (.85), and good reliability for the prosocial scale at baseline (.76) and 6-month follow-up (.88).

Results

Analytic Strategy and Preliminary Analyses

Data were examined for missing values, normality, and outliers. Overall, at both time points there was no more than 1% of missing scale items within available questionnaires and Little's Missing Completely at Random Test was not significant, indicating that these data were missing completely at random (MCAR; Little, 1988). Expectation maximization was used to replace missing scale items, which takes into consideration conditions under which missing data occurred, and uses direct estimation of the parameters by maximizing the complete data log likelihood function (see Dong & Peng, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). For father reported variables, emotion coaching and dismissing practices, hostile responses, psychological distress, efficacy, and child emotional and behavioral difficulties were non-normally distributed indicating low levels of dismissing practices, hostile responses, depressive symptoms, and child emotional and behavioral difficulties and high levels of parental efficacy. For partner reported variables, psychological distress symptoms and child emotional and behavioral difficulties were non-normally distributed, indicating low level difficulties. Teacher reported child emotional and behavioral difficulties were also non-normally distributed, indicating low level difficulties. Square root transformations were successfully applied to remedy all variables. For ease of

interpretability, and because results did not change when untransformed variables were used, analyses were conducted using untransformed variables (Norman, 2010).

There was no significant questionnaire return rate difference between the intervention (*n* = 80; 92.0%) and control (*n* = 67; 88.2%) fathers (see Figure 1 for *Participant Flow)*. Fathers failing to return questionnaires at 6-month follow up (*n* = 16) were significantly more emotion dismissing at baseline when compared with fathers who returned follow-up questionnaires (*M* = 34.33, *SD* = 5.05; *t*(161) = 2.84, *p* = .005, 95%CI 1.16, 6.43) but did not differ from the rest of the sample on any other measures. Of the 146 partners who completed baseline questionnaires, 23 (11 intervention, 12 control) failed to return questionnaires at 6-month follow-up (16%). Partners who failed to return questionnaires did not differ from the rest of the sample on any measures; and there was no significant return rate difference between the intervention (*n* = 66; 85.7%) and the waitlist control (*n* = 57; 82.6%) group. There was no significant difference in teacher questionnaire return rate between intervention (*n* = 68; 84%) and controls (*n* = 48; 88.9%).

To determine covariates (Pocock, Assmann, Enos, & Kasten, 2002), *t*-tests, chi square analyses and Pearson's correlations were conducted to examine baseline differences and relationships between demographic and outcome variables. Pocock et al., recommend inclusion of demographic covariates only if they significantly correlate with the outcome variable *and* there is a significant between-groups difference at baseline. *T*-tests and chi squared analyses showed there was no difference between intervention and controls on any demographic variables. Intervention fathers, however, reported significantly higher levels of expressive encouragement at baseline (*M* = 55.92, *SD* = 11.61), when compared with fathers from the control group (*M* = 51.32, *SD* = 11.42; *t*(161) = 2.55, *p* = .012, *d* = .69). Intervention partners reported higher empathic responses to children's emotions at baseline (*M* = 18.35, *SD* = 3.03) compared to control partners (*M* = 17.16, *SD* = 3.42), *t*(144) = 2.24, *p* = .027, *d* = .37. Teachers rated intervention children as having greater difficulties (*M* = 7.25, *SD* = 5.41) compared with control children (*M* = 5.26, *SD* = 4.29), *t*(133) = 2.27, *p* = .025, *d* = .41. These variables were all included as covariates to control for baseline differences.

Participants were nested in preschools, and therefore Multilevel Analyses Mixed Models (MM) were used. These analyses are appropriate, considering that intra-class correlations suggested that up to 11% of variance in outcome variables was explained by preschool (Heck,

Thomas, & Tabata, 2010). MM allows estimation of the fixed effect of condition on outcome variables while controlling for the random effect of preschool. First, model fit was determined using Akaike information criterion index. This showed that a restricted maximum likelihood and a variance components covariance structure with intercept and preschool as a random effect and time as fixed suited the data best (Field, 2009). Second, key variables (condition and time; each dummy coded 0 and 1) were added into the model, followed by covariates. As indicated by chi-squared statistics for the change in -2 log likelihood, adding covariates significantly improved the model (p = .01) for all outcomes (Field, 2009).

Effect sizes (d) were computed using the difference between the estimated means of the slopes (unstandardized b value) of the two groups (intervention and control over time) divided by the baseline SD of raw scores equivalent to the square root of the mean squared error from analysis of variance (ANOVA), obtained from a one-way ANOVA with preschool as the group variable (Feingold, 2009). Effect sizes (d) greater than .80 are large, .50 moderate, and .20 small.

Intervention Outcomes

Table 1 shows intervention outcomes, including statistics for the interaction between time and condition. A significant interaction between time and condition reflects a difference in slopes for the two groups (i.e., change varies depending on condition). Main effects of time are only reported in text when the interaction between time and condition was not significant.

Six months post intervention, intervention fathers reported significantly lower emotion dismissing beliefs and practices, and a greater use of empathy and expressive encouragement (aspects of emotion coaching) when compared to control fathers. Intervention fathers also reported significantly greater increases in parenting satisfaction and parenting efficacy when compared to control fathers. All fathers (intervention and control) reported reduced hostile parenting at six months follow-up as indicated by a significant main effect of time (β = .87, SE = .28, df = 164.03, t = -.82, p = .002, 95% CI .33, 1.42), and a non-significant interaction between time and condition. There was no statistically significant change for father-reported psychological distress. Finally, intervention fathers reported significantly greater reductions in their preschoolers' emotional and behavioral difficulties, compared with control fathers. All fathers reported increased prosocial skills in their children as indicated by a significant main effect of time (β = -.62, SE = .21, df = 164.51, t = -3.03, p = .003, 95% CI -1.03, -.22), and a non-significant interaction between time and condition (p = .079).

For partner-reported outcomes (see Table 2), intervention partners reported significantly greater reductions in their own emotion dismissing beliefs and psychological distress when compared with control partners. Their empathy remained unchanged as indicated by a non-significant interaction and non-significant main effect of time. However, both intervention and control partners reported lower emotional and behavioral difficulties in their children at six months follow-up (β =1.71, *SE* = .51, *df* = 126.02, *t* = 3.38, *p* = .001, 95 CI .71, 2.71).

Teachers in both the intervention and control conditions reported children had lower emotional and behavioral difficulties at six months follow up (β =1.35, *SE* = .60, *df* = , t(116.23) = 2.56, *p* = 026) and better pro-social skills (β =-.82, *SE* = .29, *df* = , t(128.00) = -2.88, *p* = 005, 95%CI -1.39, -.26), however, there was no time by condition interaction (see Table 3).

Discussion

This study evaluated the efficacy of the *Dads Tuning in to Kids* program with a sample of fathers of 4-5 year old preschool children. *Dads TIK* is a modification of an emotion-focused parenting program that has established evidence although predominantly with mothers. This study sought to test whether an adapted version of the program would positively impact fathers, their partners and their children. Immediate post-intervention changes in intervention fathers were reported in Wilson et al (2016). The current study extends these preliminary findings by looking at whether changes were seen from pre-intervention to 6-month follow up using a comparison control condition so that normative changes could also be considered (i.e., do children improve in their behavior due to maturation).

Following *Dads TIK*, fathers in the intervention condition reported significantly greater empathy (large effect size) and emotional expressive encouragement (medium effect size) with their preschool child, both key aspects of emotion coaching taught in the program. These results are consistent with other community trials of TIK with predominantly mothers (i.e., Havighurst et al, 2010) and very similar to the preliminary outcomes seen post-intervention in this trial (Wilson et al., 2016) suggesting that the changes fathers made were maintained over time. The empirical literature reports that fathers tend to have a narrower emotion vocabulary and are less likely to talk with their children about emotions than mothers (e.g., Aznar & Tenenbaum, 2015). The outcomes from *Dads TIK* suggest fathers can learn to emotion coach, resulting in changes to their beliefs about emotions as well as self-reported changes in their responses when their children experience emotions. In *Dads TIK*, fathers often gave qualitative feedback to the

facilitators that it was new for them to name feelings and talk about emotions. They often said that they had had no role models of males in their own lives who talked about emotions, and the program was the first opportunity they had for considering how exploring emotions might be of benefit to them and their children. Learning these skills in how to talk about emotions within the context of a male-only group further validated and normalized that other men valued this skill and wanted to have these conversations with their children.

Fathers reported significant reductions in parenting beliefs and practices that were emotionally dismissing. In particular fathers reported changes in their beliefs about sadness, fear and anger in their children (large effect size), reporting that they were less dismissive of these emotions. They also reported changes in their responses to questions about what they would do in situations where their children were emotional (i.e., receiving a gift they did not like) endorsing that they would be less likely to minimize or be critical of their child's emotions at these times (medium effect size). *Dads TIK* taught fathers the importance of paying attention to and responding supportively to children's negative emotions in order to help them learn about and regulate these feelings. Fathers also explored their family of origin experiences with emotions, considered their own parenting experience with emotions when they were children and looked at how these experiences had shaped their automatic reactions to their children's emotions. In recent years there has been an increasing acceptance of emotional competence/intelligence as an important life skill (Denham, 1998; Goleman, 1996; Halberstadt et al., 2001), and this changing cultural value may have helped fathers to shift their beliefs about emotions and engage in a new way of responding to their children's emotions. Changes in parenting from one generation to the next especially in the case of reducing emotionally neglectful parenting, requires both an awareness of the impact of one's family of origin while also learning new parenting skills (Leerkes & Crockenberg, 2006). Fathers participating in *Dads TIK* reported improvements in their responses to emotions in their children and (as part of the program) explored their own experiences with emotions in their families of origin. Attendance rates for the program were extremely high with 87% of fathers attending 5 or more of the 7 sessions and only one father dropping out - suggesting that a focus on emotions including this exploration of their own childhood experiences with emotions was acceptable and useful.

Parenting confidence was another important outcome from Dads TIK. Intervention fathers, but not control fathers, reported significantly greater parenting satisfaction and efficacy

in their role as fathers. Having confidence and self-efficacy with parenting occurs when parents believe that they can be effective in the contexts in which development occurs (Glatz & Buchanan, 2015). Being able to respond with confidence and skill to their children's emotional needs, as well as having a greater understanding of the important role that fathers play in children's development, may have contributed to this increase in parenting confidence.

There were no significant reductions in psychological distress scores for fathers, however the sample had low baseline scores making changes difficult to detect. However, partners of fathers in the intervention condition (but not control condition) reported significant reductions in psychological distress. This was a pleasing, yet surprising finding, given partners were not part of the intervention. This reduction in partner psychological distress may have occurred because fathers were using emotion coaching in supportive ways with their partners or because fathers were taking greater responsibility for the emotional needs of the children in the house, thereby reducing stress of parenting young children for the partner. This systemic outcome provides further support for father participation in parenting programs.

Partners of fathers in the intervention condition but not the control condition reported reductions in emotion dismissive beliefs. This may have occurred because fathers were passing on information learned in the program, because fathers were modelling emotion coaching, or because fathers were able to 'step in' when they noticed their partner struggling thereby reducing the potential for partners to engage in harsh parenting (Belsky, Woodworth, & Crnic, 1996). There were, however, no significant improvements in partners' empathy skills with their children following father's participation in the intervention: emotion coaching did not appear to have generalized from fathers' learning. Learning empathy skills may require direct teaching and partners did not receive this. Such a provision either in the form of written, online or direct teaching of emotion coaching would likely have strengthened the intervention impact.

The final important outcomes were reported changes in children's functioning. Fathers in the intervention but not control condition reported significant improvements in their children's social, emotional and behavioral functioning after the intervention (with a small effect size) and a trend to significant increases in prosocial behavior. Partners and teachers did not report these same changes, however, across the whole sample (intervention and control) partners and teachers reported significant improvements in children's social, emotional and behavioral functioning. Children's behavior often improves across the preschool age as language, emotion competence

and social skills develop (Denham, 1998) and this may explain why there were 'normative' changes reported by fathers, their partners and the child's teacher across the entire sample.

In addition, fathers in the intervention condition reported significantly greater improvements in their children's behavior than those reported by control fathers. There are a number of possible reasons for this. Fathers in the intervention condition may have experienced improved behavior in their children following participation in Dads TIK because of changes in their parenting, however these changes in children's behavior may not have generalized to other contexts. Also plausible is that fathers responses may have been subject to expectancy bias – because fathers had participated in Dads TIK they hoped that their children's behavior had improved. Expectancy bias is a common challenge in intervention trials, often mitigated by using observation assessments (Caspi & Bootzin, 2002). This was beyond the scope of the present study but would be an important area for future research.

Strengths and Limitations

This is the first emotion-focused parenting program for fathers reported in the literature. Strengths of the study included that the program was tailored specifically for fathers and resulted in excellent retention of fathers. Use of multi-informant measurement enabled richer, more detailed outcomes about family functioning. A control group enabled comparison over a 6-month period establishing the efficacy of the program relative to control participants via father, partner and teacher reports. Statistical analysis methods allowed the effect of preschools to be controlled for in analyses.

Limitations of the study were that only questionnaires were used, and both fathers and partners were subject to expectancy bias. Observation methods would strengthened the research design especially with coders being blind to condition status. The beneficial effects of meeting as a group (placebo effect) were not controlled for. Future research that compared Dads TIK with a control condition where fathers met for 7 parent support sessions would be useful so that the beneficial effects of the group could be partialled out. Because questionnaire data were not collected from control participants or partners/teachers post-intervention, it was not possible to conduct analyses examining whether changes occurred from pre-post intervention or from post - to 6-month follow up. This decision was made in order to reduce burden on participants and to prioritize data collection from all measure sources at 6-month follow-up to see if changes occurred longer-term.

Fathers were predominantly well educated and from a higher SES and so generalization of the results to other groups of fathers must be done with caution. That said, a recent meta-analysis found there were no differences in father involvement and child outcomes across SES (McWayne, Downer, Campos, & Harris, 2013) and teaching fathers skills is likely to have positive impacts irrespective of SES. Other TIK evaluations with lower SES populations have resulted in similar effect sizes (Havighurst et al., 2013; Havighurst et al., 2015).

Conclusion

This efficacy trial of *Dads TIK*, an emotion-focused parenting program designed specifically for fathers, resulted in changes in fathers' reports of their emotion socialization practices that were associated with changes in partners' functioning as well as father-reports of children's social, emotional and behavioral functioning. This evaluation of a father-only program makes a significant contribution to the existing evidence-base on parenting interventions and suggests that fathers are interested in and amenable to participating in a program that focuses on emotions. Further, this study showed fathers appeared to improve in their emotion socialization. Fathers like mothers are capable of being able to respond supportively and use emotion coaching with their children, and the impacts of acquisition of these skills appears to be systemic improvements in family functioning.

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Table 1

Intervention Outcomes for Father-reported Variables from Baseline to 6-Month Follow-up

		Baseline		6-Month FU		Test of Interaction						
Measures	Condition	*Mean*[a]	*SE*	*Mean*[a]	*SE*	*β*	*SE*	*df*	*t*	*p*	95CI%	*d*
Empathy (PESQ)	Intervention	17.57	.29	20.58	.30	2.61	.49	165.90	5.38	<.001	1.65, 3.57	.86
	Control	17.40	.31	17.81	.33							
Emotion Dismissing Beliefs	Intervention	35.27	.56	29.20	.58	-6.47	.89	158.04	-7.25	<.001	-8.24, -4.71	1.25
(PESQ)	Control	34.20	.59	34.60	.62							
Expressive Encouragement*	Intervention	55.87	1.19	65.98	1.23	8.13	1.59	149.12	5.11	<.001	4.99, 11.28	.69
(CCNES)	Control	51.09	1.25	53.04	1.32							
Emotion Dismissing Practices	Intervention	64.59	1.96	50.52	2.01	-13.6	2.83	165.45	-4.81	<.001	-19.23, -	.71
CCNES)	Control	57.60	2.07	57.16	2.16						8.04	
Hostile Parenting	Intervention	9.41	.34	8.54	.35	-.34	.41	164.03	-.82	.412	-1.14, .47	.11
	Control	9.38	.36	8.80	.37							
Parenting Satisfaction	Intervention	38.31	.69	40.89	.71	2.34	1.01	165.13	2.32	.021	.35, 4.34	.34
	Control	39.02	.72	39.25	.75							
Parenting Efficacy	Intervention	26.02	.57	29.87	.58	2.48	.77	164.55	3.21	.002	.96, 4.01	.46
	Control	27.14	.59	28.50	.62							
Psychological Distress	Intervention	4.67	.36	3.96	.37	-.55	.54	169.36	-1.03	.306	-1.62, .51	.17
	Control	4.12	.37	3.97	.39							
Child Total Difficulties	Intervention	10.92	.55	8.07	.56	-2.04	.75	168.30	-2.73	.007	-3.51, -.57	.39
	Control	9.02	.58	8.20	.60							

Child Prosocial Skills	Intervention	6.95	.20	7.57	.21	.54	.30	165.83	1.76	.080	-.06, 1.14	.29
	Control	7.57	.21	7.61	.22							

Note. *Significant baseline between groups difference; [a]all analyses adjusted for pre-school membership and variables with baseline between groups differences. Effect sizes (*d*) greater than .80 are large; equal to .50 moderate, and .20 small.

Table 2

Intervention Outcomes for Partner-reported Variables from Baseline to 6-Month Follow-up

		Baseline		6-Month FU		Test of Interaction						
Measures	Condition	*Mean*[a]	*SE*	*Mean*[a]	*SE*	*β*	*SE*	*df*	*t*	*p*	95CI%	*d*
Empathy* (PESQ)	Intervention	18.33	.38	18.86	.39	.20	.57	147.21	.36	.719	-.91, 1.32	.06
	Control	17.04	.40	17.37	.42							
Emotion Dismissing Beliefs	Intervention	34.55	.67	31.65	.71	-2.09	.96	140.81	-2.18	.031	-3.98, -.19	.37
(PESQ)	Control	34.46	.70	33.64	.75							
Psychological Distress	Intervention	4.28	.38	3.70	.40	-1.30	.57	144.28	-2.27	.025	-2.42, -.17	.42
	Control	4.03	.40	4.74	.43							
SDQ - Total Difficulties	Intervention	9.81	.59	8.02	.62	-1.19	.83	136.04	-1.43	.155	-2.84, .46	.22
	Control	8.78	.62	8.17	.66							
SDQ – Prosocial Skills	Intervention	7.52	.21	7.91	.23	-.02	.35	141.74	-.07	.948	-.71, .67	.01
	Control	7.57	.22	7.98	.24							

Note. *Significant baseline between groups difference; [a]all analyses adjusted for pre-school membership and variables with baseline between groups differences.

Table 3

Intervention Outcomes for Teacher-reported Variables from Baseline to 6-MonthFollow-up

		Baseline		6-Mo FU		Test of Interaction						
Measures	Condition	*Mean*[a]	*SE*	*Mean*[a]	*SE*	*β*	*SE*	*df*	*t*	*p*	95CI%	*d*
SDQ - Total Difficulties	Intervention	7.24	.58	5.82	.61	-1.06	.92	135.	-1.15	.253	-.2.89,	.21
	Control	5.92	.67	5.56	.62			79			.76	
SDQ – Prosocial Skills	Intervention	6.73	.25	7.55	.27	.37	.43	126.	.84	.400	-.50,	.18
	Control	7.01	.29	7.55	.30			38			1.24	

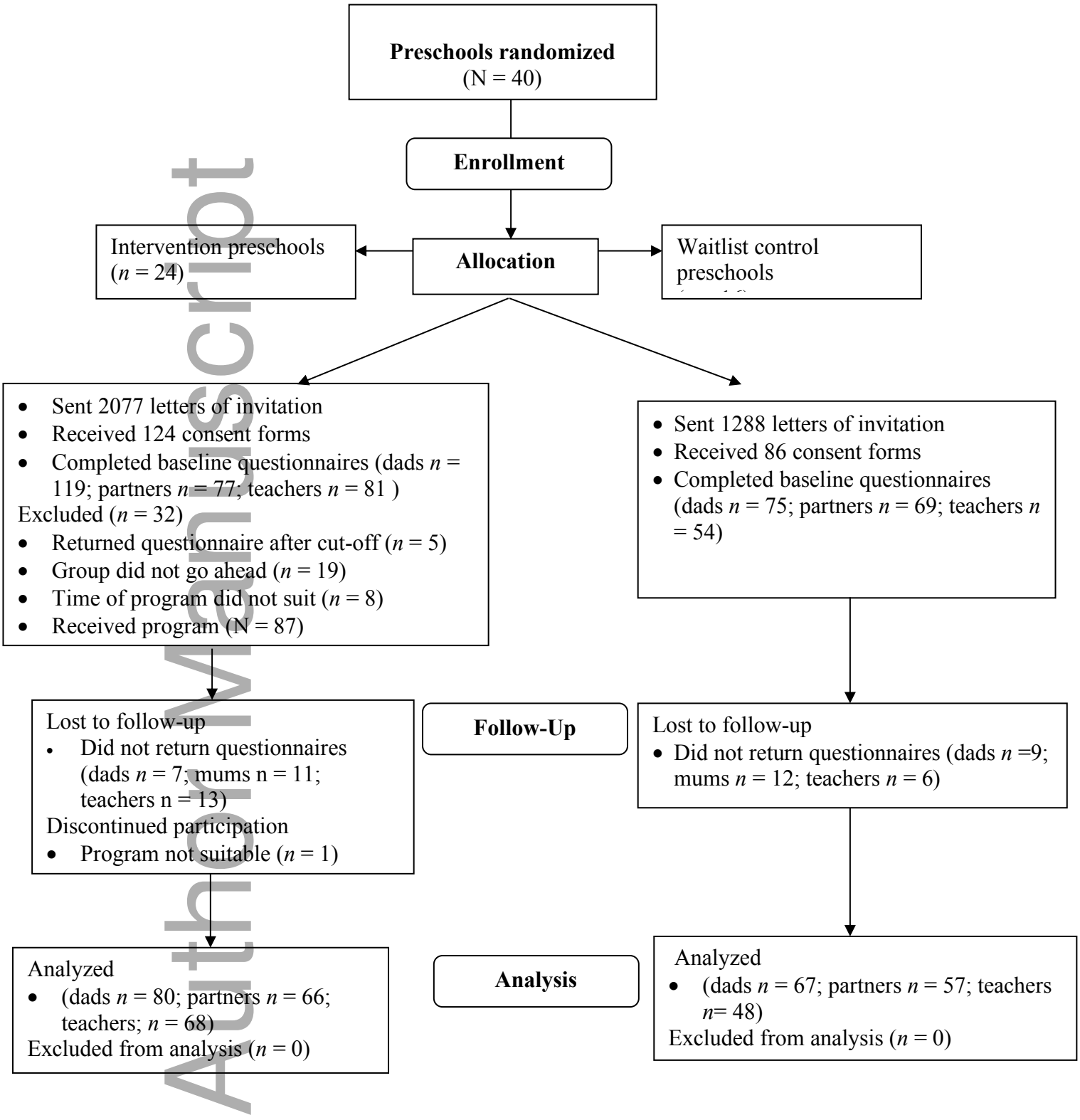

Figure 1 Participant Flow