

Project to reduce violence in Panama City with improved parenting

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Anilena delivering a session in Panama City. Credit: University of Manchester

University of Manchester researchers have piloted a parenting trial which aims to improve child behaviour in Panama City the place with the eighth highest murder rate in the world.

Gang crime and [child maltreatment](#) are pressing concerns in Panama and

the UN described the capital Panama City as having the world's eighth highest murder rate in 2014. To mitigate this, the UN and the Panamanian government have prioritised investing in children to keep them away from gangs and drugs.

As part of this process, the researchers from The University of Manchester's School of Psychological Sciences tested a parenting intervention in six primary schools in low income neighbourhoods in the city.

Anilena Mejia led the pilot study: "We felt that a lack of resources shouldn't mean that children and parents in poorer areas receive less help than those in wealthier countries," she said. "The idea behind this pilot was to establish if a simple level of support could make a difference."

The researchers recruited 108 parents of children aged 3-12 who had been selected by the schools and divided them into two groups. One group was a control which received no intervention and the other attended a session called 'dealing with disobedience'.

In the two-hour session, this group watched videos and took part in planned activities which addressed issues such as encouraging good behaviour and reasons for disobedience. The method, known as Triple P, had been developed in Australia and was accompanied by workbooks and resources which the parents could take home with them.

After six months, the parents were interviewed about their child's behaviour and, compared to the control group there was a marked improvement.

One parent, the mother of boy aged 10, said: "Now if something happens, I take action. I find a solution. Before I will turn away and leave, because I thought there was no solution. But not anymore."

Another, the mother of boy aged 9, said: "After the program I understood how my yelling was affecting my kids, and that I was making them be inhibited"

Anilena added: "This was a small project but it showed some encouraging signs of success. With more time, we'd like to develop resources which are specific for the culture and issues in particular countries and use them to break the cycle of poor parental skills which leads to crime and ill health."

More information: The paper, 'A Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial of a Brief Parenting Intervention in Low-Resource Settings in Panama,' was published in the journal *Prevention Science*.

Provided by University of Manchester

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