

Evaluating a low-intensity group programme to support care-work-life balance in parents of autistic children with a multi-method study

Sara Van der Paelt^{1,2}, Noor Seghers^{3,4}, Marleen Van Noten^{3,4}, Jarymke Maljaars^{1,4}, Ilse Noens^{1,4}, Bea Maes^{3,4}, Herbert Roeyers^{1,2}
¹Academic Collaborative Centre for Autism; ²Ghent University; ³Magenta; ⁴KU Leuven

Background

Academic Collaborative Centre for Autism:

- Research on support and services
- In practice settings
- In co-creation with autistic individuals, professionals and policy makers

More information on our website

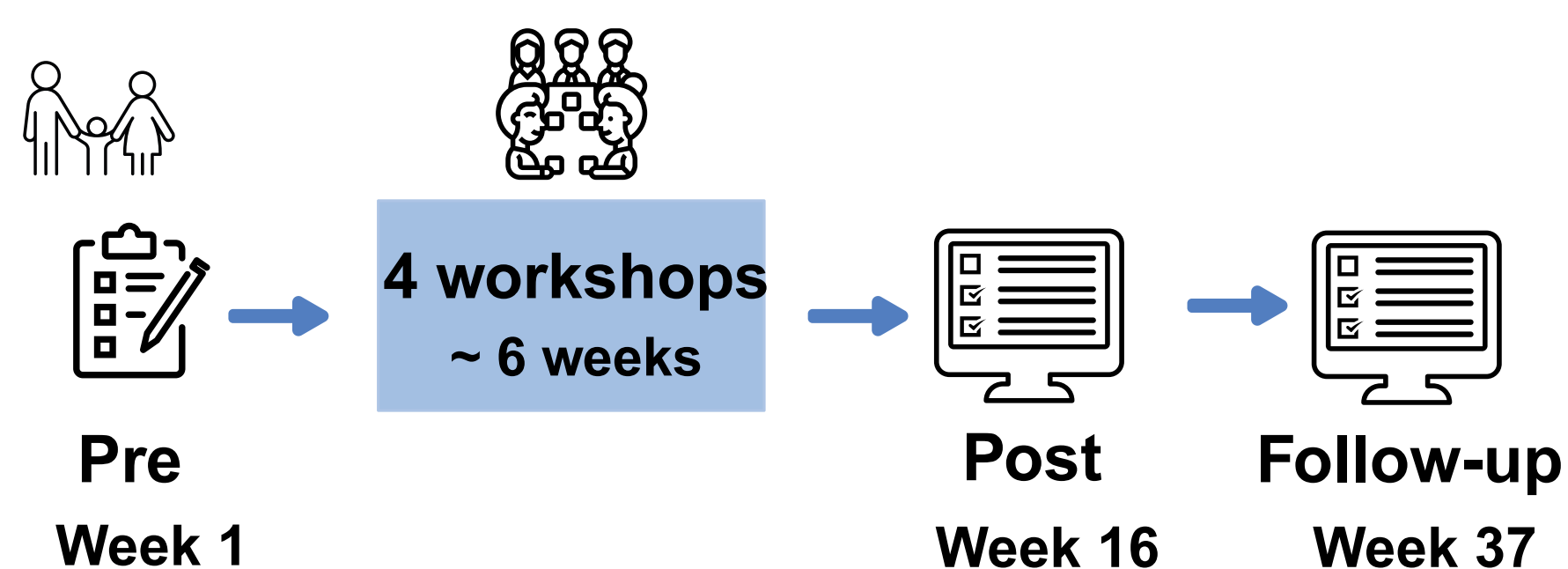


- Parents of autistic children often struggle to balance personal and caregiving roles
- **Goal of the study:** evaluate a low-intensity group support programme to help parents find balance in these roles

Methods

Study 1

- 43 parents of autistic children completed paper/online questionnaires on 3 time points:



- We assessed 7 goals of the support programme:
 - Care-work-life balance
 - Resilience
 - Empowerment
 - Professional support
 - Practical support
 - Emotional support
 - Family quality of life

Study 2



- We interviewed 12 parents of autistic children
- They followed the workshops between 1 and 10 years ago
- We asked about long-term impact and active ingredients

Support programme



- 4 workshops for parents with a child with extra care needs
- Group led by an expert by experience
- See Magentaproject.be

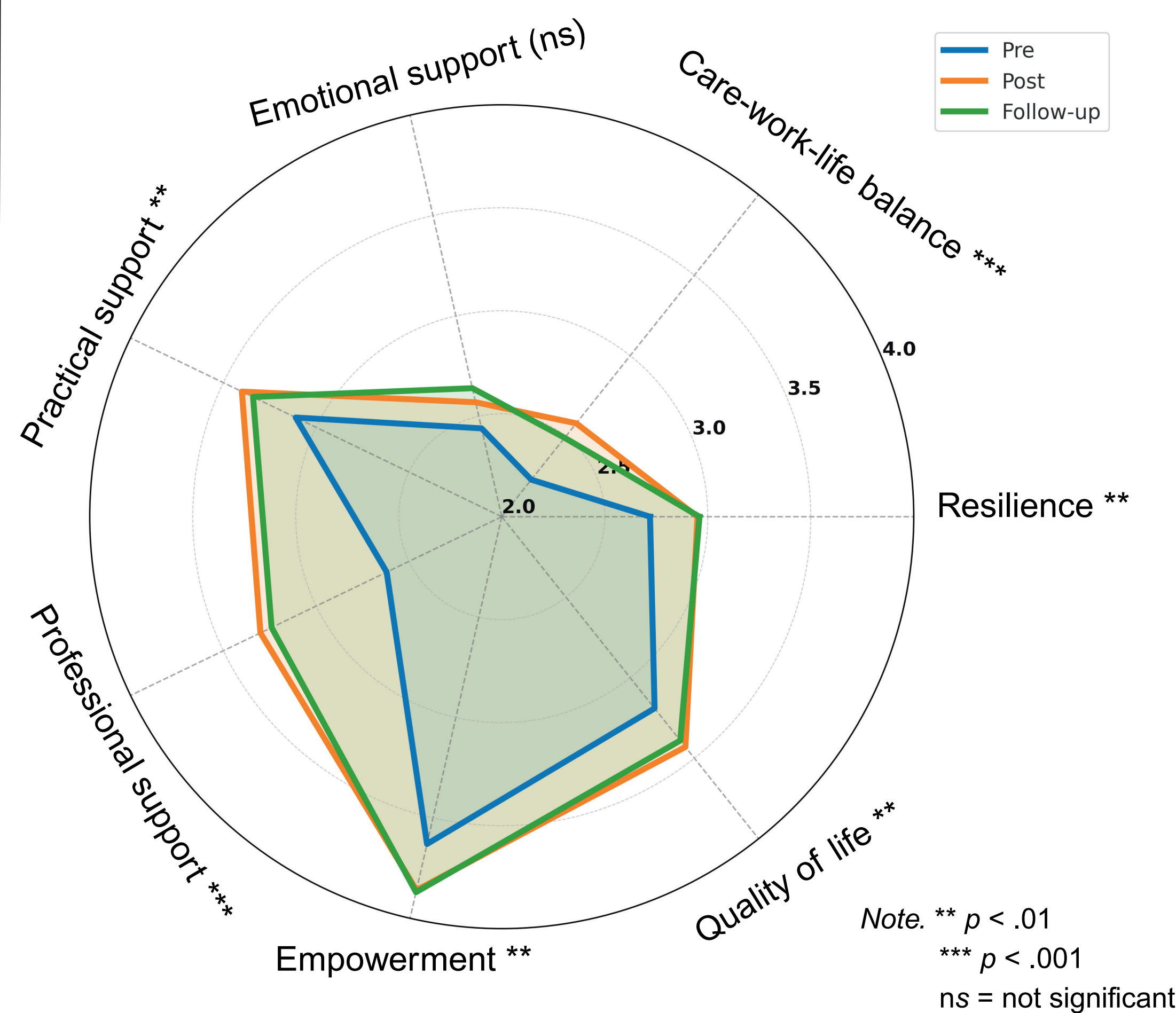
Themes



Results

Study 1

Radarplot of change across support goals



Key findings:

- Significant changes were observed about 10 weeks after the last workshop in resilience, care-work-life balance, professional support, empowerment, and quality of life.
- Practical support also changed, while emotional support did not show significant change.
- Changes remained until the follow-up almost 9 months after the first workshop.

Study 2

Key themes:

Long-term impact:

- **Knowledge:** better understanding of useful services and parents' rights
- **Peer support:** value of sharing experiences with other parents
- **Awareness:** increased insight into the importance of balancing roles and shared caregiving - however often difficult to put into practice
- **Implementation:** applying tips takes time and, for some, requires additional guidance

Active Ingredients:

- **Sharing experiences** with parents in similar situations
- Receiving relevant **information**
- **Reflection** exercises

"It was nice to sit together with people who go through the same things. You realize you're not alone, and you pick up tips from others that you can try at home."

"Magenta helped me realize that it's okay not to do everything perfectly — to let go of some pressure and share the care more."

Conclusion

- A low-intensity group programme can enhance parents' care-work-life balance, resilience, perceived support, and quality of life.
- Practical information, peer exchange, and reflection exercises proved to be key ingredients.
- Such accessible interventions may offer a cost-effective way to support families, with potential benefits for both parents and children.