Life Course Centre

Action Circles
Enhancing Social and Policy Impact for Evidence-based Parenting and Family Support Through Collective Action

April Hoang

Alina Morawska

Suzanne E.U. Kerns

Cheri J. Shapiro

Tony Biglan

Matthew R. Sanders

Carys Chainey

Winnifred Louis

Australian Government
Australian Research Council

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Research Summary

Why was the research done?

Families today face numerous challenges that can significantly impact the wellbeing of children, parents, the family unit and wider community. Not only do they face the longstanding concerns arising from navigating a complex world with social, physical, mental, economic, and many other demands, but also modern issues such as climate change, technology, social media, wars and the COVID-19 pandemic. These complex issues require a joined-up movement to improve child, parent, and family wellbeing.

What were the key findings?

This paper introduces Action Circles (ACs), a novel framework built on collective action and implementation science aimed at enhancing the social and policy impact of evidence-based parenting and family support. In this paper, we describe the AC model, its theoretical foundation, practical guidelines, and future research agenda. ACs present a promising framework for advancing evidence-based parenting support.

What does this mean for policy and practice?

By unifying diverse efforts and providing structured guidance, ACs have the potential to bridge the gap between policy, research and practice, significantly improving the lives of children, parents, and families.

Citation

The authors

April Hoang
Parenting and Family Support Centre, The University of Queensland
Email: a.phuong@uq.edu.au
https://about.uq.edu.au/experts/30409

Alina Morawska
Parenting and Family Support Centre, The University of Queensland
Email: alina@psy.uq.edu.au
https://about.uq.edu.au/experts/545

Suzanne E.U. Kerns
The Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, Department of Pediatrics, School of Medicine, University of Colorado Anschutz
Email: suzanne.kerns@cuanschutz.edu

Cheri J. Shapiro
Institute for Families in Society, College of Social Work, University of South Carolina
Email: CSHAPIRO@mailbox.sc.edu

Tony Biglan
Oregon Research Institute
Email: tony@ori.org

Matthew R.Sanders
Parenting and Family Support Centre, The University of Queensland
Email: m.sanders@psy.uq.edu.au

Carys Chainey
Parenting and Family Support Centre, The University of Queensland
Email: c.chainey@uq.edu.au

Winnifred Louis
School of Psychology, The University of Queensland
Email: w.louis@psy.uq.edu.au

Acknowledgements/Funding Sources

Action Circles: Enhancing Social and Policy Impact for Evidence-based Parenting and Family Support through Collective Action

April Hoang[1,2], Alina Morawska[1,2], Suzanne E.U Kerns[3], Cheri J. Shapiro[4], Tony Biglan[5], Matthew R Sanders[1, 2], Carys Chainey[1,2], Winnifred Louis[6,]

[1] Parenting and Family Support Centre, School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Qld, Australia

[2] Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course

[3] The Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, Department of Pediatrics, School of Medicine, University of Colorado Anschutz, Aurora, USA

[4] Institute for Families in Society, College of Social Work, University of South Carolina, USA

[5] Oregon Research Institute, Springfield, Oregon, USA

[6] School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Qld, Australia

Disclosure of Interests

Abstract

Families today face numerous challenges that can significantly impact the wellbeing of children, parents, the family unit and wider community. Not only do they face the longstanding concerns arising from navigating a complex world with social, physical, mental, economic, and many other demands, but also modern issues such as climate change, technology, social media, wars and the COVID-19 pandemic. These complex issues require a joined-up movement to improve child, parent, and family wellbeing. This paper introduces Action Circles (ACs), a novel framework built on collective action and implementation science aimed at enhancing the social and policy impact of evidence-based parenting and family support. In this paper, we describe the AC model, its theoretical foundation, practical guidelines, and future research agenda. ACs present a promising framework for advancing evidence-based parenting support. By unifying diverse efforts and providing structured guidance, ACs have the potential to bridge the gap between policy, research and practice, significantly improving the lives of children, parents, and families.

Introduction

Children, parents, and families have always faced a multitude of challenges to living a happy, healthy, and fulfilled life. Navigating relationships, developing and maintaining physical and mental health, guiding and supporting one other, balancing competing demands, managing economically; these longstanding issues are as relevant today as they were three hundred or three thousand years ago. In recent decades, child adjustment difficulties and psychopathology have become increasingly prevalent worldwide, affecting up to 20% of children and young people (Polanczyk et al., 2015; Vasileva et al., 2021). These figures have worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic, with evidence revealing significant and persistent adjustment difficulties across all age groups (Fong & Iarocci, 2020; Flaskerud, 2023; Panchal et al., 2023; Samji et al., 2022). Other factors accompanying living in the 21st century, such as the risks associated with climate change and the pervasive influence of modern technology, social media, generative AI and the rising cost of living including affordable housing, can all have individual and cumulative impacts. Many of these contemporary challenges, are increasingly complex and beyond the control of individuals, families, or specific communities, necessitating thoughtful, evidence-informed responses. However, mobilizing communities, countries, and even cross-national efforts can be daunting and fraught with challenges that limit the ability to have sustained positive social impact.

In past decades, numerous evidence-based interventions to support children, parents, and families have been developed (Doyle et al., 2022), however, their varied methods and foci often preclude coordinated implementation, and their use alone does not necessarily translate to the community or societal changes needed to support families more broadly (Smith et al., 2020; Weisenmuller & Hilton, 2021). Furthermore, there continues to be a gap between research, policy and practice that hinders the effectiveness and reach of intervention efforts (Shapiro et al., 2012;

Weisenmuller & Hilton, 2021). Various approaches, including engagement research (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2023), implementation science (Kerns et al., 2023), and policies regarding family wellbeing (e.g., https://www.chapinhall.org) have been explored to straddle this gap, yet the translation of research into interventions that achieve meaningful broad changes for children, parents, and families has not seen substantial progress.

Addressing the many complex and intertwined challenges faced by children, parents and families thus necessitates collaborative approaches that produce improved practical solutions and robust systems for sharing and transferring knowledge. These mechanisms are crucial for facilitating the timely implementation of evidence-based programs that can effectively influence policy and practice. However, bridging the gap between research and implementation requires a collective and strategic approach, with a focus on effecting real change for progress in supporting child and family wellbeing. One promising avenue for advancing policy and social impact and creating dramatic change in the current care landscape in evidence-based parenting intervention is to use collective action.

Collective Action

Collective actions, by definition, are actions undertaken by individuals as representatives of groups, aiming to improve the conditions of a group (Wright et al., 1990). Collective action is important in effecting social change (Gulliver et al., 2021). The actions bring to bear the insights, skills, and resources of a community, which may be much greater than those of an individual acting alone. Collective actions have played a pivotal role in the history of social change, demonstrating their significance and impact in uprisings across the globe. Examples include the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the global Women's Suffrage Movement, the

Marriage Equality Movement, ongoing environmental movements, and the Black Lives Matter movement. These social movements exemplify how collective actions can challenge injustice, reshape policy, and catalyze social change.

Collective action, however, has often encompassed a wide variety of topics, which has a diversity of research foci (Hornsey et al., 2006). This diversity exacerbates the challenge of measuring the outcomes of collective action which can occur over long periods of time and have a variety of goals within the same movement (Delina & Diesendorf, 2016). For collective action to deliver political and practical impacts that benefit children, parents, and families and to bridge the research to practice gap, a guiding framework is essential.

To meet this goal, we present an innovative framework for collective action in the context of evidence-based parenting and family support. This framework is designed to consolidate knowledge into an actionable model, primarily aimed at unifying efforts to advance the state of the art in evidence-based interventions for children and families. ACs aim to synergize two often decoupled areas of study: (1) collective action and (2) implementation science, responding to the pressing need for a collective action-oriented movement to significantly enhance the wellbeing of children, parents, and families. Throughout this paper, we will examine the theoretical foundations, elucidate the conceptual framework, and delineate the underpinnings of this approach. We also offer procedural guidance for its implementation across various sectors such as policy, research, and practice, emphasizing knowledge transfer and impactful dissemination outcomes. Concurrently, we will identify challenges and obstacles, outlining a research agenda to ensure the sustained deployment of ACs as an innovative approach to drive meaningful change in supporting children, parents, and families. We expect that this framework can transform the diverse and scattered concepts into specific steps and guidelines that have the

potential for transformative change, which can move the field forward in improving child, parent, and family wellbeing at a population level.

What is an Action Circle?

ACs are a model of collective action in which a small working group is brought together for a brief period to study a specific, defined problem, and devise a solution. The purpose of ACs is to bring together diverse individuals with different ideas and expertise, contributing towards generating an innovative solution for a given issue that would lead to social and policy impacts.

Theoretical foundation of Action Circles

The ACs working model integrates theories and evidence from both collective action and implementation sciences.

Collective action theories are commonly concerned with two questions: What are the factors responsible for mobilizing people to engage in collective actions? How can collective actions affect society at large, triggering enduring social change? Many collective models seek to answer those questions and can be used to support the formulation of ACs. One example is Gulliver and colleagues (2021), who distinguish seven goals of collective action, including: raising Awareness of a cause, Building sympathy, generating Intentions, eliciting Actions, Sustaining motivation over time and in the face of failure, building Coalitions, and Avoiding counter-mobilization or backlashes (ABIASCA). Gulliver and colleagues (2021) emphasized that it is useful for a collective action group to distinguish these goals of their action because we can usefully map the goals against the status quo: in some cases, people are unaware of a problem and need awareness-raising; in other cases, people are aware and sympathetic, but not yet generating intentions or implementing them, or they have given up.

In addition to goals, in ABIASCA (Gulliver et al., 2021), distinguishing short-term, medium-term, and longer-term timeframes of action is also important: very different tactics may be used when targeting immediate over longer-term change, and many tactics have short-term effects that do not last, or lower immediate impact but a greater prospect of longer-term effectiveness. In ABIASCA, forming a group for action also includes seeking to build a consensus around the timeframe, audiences, and goals, so that appropriate tactics can be thoughtfully considered.

Implementation science

Implementation science examines the methods and strategies required to effectively incorporate research findings and evidence-based practices into routine practice and policy across different contexts (Damschroder et al., 2009). This field aims to understand and overcome the barriers to implementation while also evaluating the effectiveness and sustainability of these practices in real-world settings. While ACs are not widely recognized in implementation science literature, various implementation theories, frameworks, and models can be adapted to support and guide change efforts through ACs (Nilsen, 2020). First, implementation science indicates that implementation is generally phasic, meaning that it starts with exploring and assessing implementation readiness, progresses to preparing for the specific implementation, then moves towards implementing the innovation, and concludes with sustainability efforts (Moullin et al., 2020). Second, there is consideration to the multi-level nature of implementation needs. Each of these phases necessitates attention to multiple implementation drivers, including those related to organizational capacity, leadership, and enhancing competencies to enact the change or deliver the implementation (Fixsen, 2005). Third, an evidence-based approach is required throughout the life of an implementation cycle. This commitment to evidence-based practices ensures that the

efforts of ACs are grounded in reliable data and proven methodologies, enhancing the likelihood

of achieving meaningful and sustainable outcomes. Last but not least, a fundamental objective of

implementation science is to promote equity in the availability and effectiveness of programs

(Kerkhoff et al., 2022). Implementation science advocates for addressing equity-related

considerations, including barriers and challenges unique to various population groups. This

approach emphasizes inclusivity and the active engagement of individuals directly impacted by

the problem in developing and implementing strategies. By doing so, programs can better ensure

that their solutions are relevant, effective, and accessible to all, thereby fostering more equitable

outcomes across diverse communities.

ACs' Distinguishing Features

First, *ACs have clearly defined and measurable goals*. A clearly defined and measurable

goal is emphasized in both implementation science and collective action theories. According to

the ABIASCA model (Gulliver et al., 2021), there are seven distinct objectives that ACs can

pursue. The specific goals of ACs depend on their current stage and the issues they seek to

address, resulting in diverse aims across different ACs. For instance, when examining the global

movement to ban corporal punishment, one can observe various actors across regions and time

periods who have achieved significant milestones for their audiences (Durrant, 2022; Zolotor &

Puzia, 2010). Academic scholars play a critical role in raising awareness and fostering empathy

for change by documenting the detrimental effects of corporal punishment (Havighurst et al.,

2023). Meanwhile, practitioners and community groups may advocate for intentional changes at

individual, institutional, and societal levels: urging parents to adopt new practices, institutions

and nations to develop educational materials, and legislators and organizational leaders to

implement new laws and policies. Regardless of which goal ACs strive to address, they must be

clear, definable, and measurable. These attributes are vital for cultivating a shared vision among group members, thus aligning efforts towards common objectives. Moreover, clearly defined goals enable groups to devise effective strategies and monitor their progress to achieve the best outcomes.

Second, ACs *operate within brief, defined timeframes*. Determining the appropriate working timeframe is crucial to the success of any collective action, as it influences the tactics employed (Gulliver et al., 2021). The timeframe for ACs is intentionally brief, enabling busy individuals to contribute meaningfully without committing to full-time involvement. This does not imply that ACs are only suited for short-term impacts. On the contrary, achieving significant social impact and fostering long-term improvements for children and families requires a comprehensive vision and meticulous planning. Nevertheless, implementation by its nature is phased and multi-level, with each phase comprising unique issues, drivers, and goals that are best addressed separately. This approach ensures that each phase receives focused attention and resources, facilitating more effective and sustainable outcomes (Fixsen, 2005; Moullin et al., 2020).

In ACs, complex issues are divided into multiple phases, with each phase addressing incremental steps toward solving the larger issue. This approach forms a network of interlinked ACs, each contributing to the overall goal through focused, manageable efforts. For instance, in the context of disseminating evidence-based family programs, an initial AC might focus on organizing a plan for how subsequent ACs can implement strategies to secure funding, policy changes, training, and outcome monitoring necessary to enhance family wellbeing across an entire community. This approach makes complex challenges more manageable and allows groups to dedicate their attention to different factors that drive the success of each

implementation phase that collectively contribute to broader goals. (Refer to Figure 1 for detailed illustrations on the organization and functioning of such ACs.)

Third, *ACs emphasize an evidence-based approach* to their operations and the monitoring of outcomes. In ACs, the use of evidence-based practices and policies is paramount. This approach applies to both the group's functioning and the selection of tactics that have been experimentally validated (Anderson et al., 2009; White & Geffner, 2022). Consequently, ongoing monitoring and evaluation are encouraged throughout the lifespan of an AC to ensure that the strategies employed are effective and to facilitate adjustments as needed. During the early establishment phase, ACs are encouraged to assess their implementation readiness, considering factors such as overall motivation or willingness to engage in a change effort, the general capacities of the agency, organization, or community, and any specific capacities required for the change effort (Domlyn et al., 2021). Continuous monitoring is also encouraged during and especially at the end of the AC to inform the group's strategies and indicates whether the AC has successfully achieved its goals. This evaluation also helps determine the focus of subsequent ACs.

Fourth, ACs place a strong emphasis on consumer engagement. Rooted in implementation science, ACs advocate for addressing equity-related considerations (Kerkhoff et al., 2022). This approach underscores the importance of inclusivity and actively involves individuals directly affected by the issues in developing and implementing strategies. By ensuring that the solutions are co-created with those impacted, ACs can develop relevant and impactful strategies tailored to the target audience (Trischler et al., 2019). This inclusive engagement is crucial for making solutions more relevant, effective, and accessible to all, thereby promoting sustainable dissemination and outcomes. Each proposed solution thus must undergo evaluation for its

appropriateness and acceptance by the community. This approach ensures that evidence-based

practices are applied to address issues deemed most pressing by community members, thereby

addressing inequity and promoting equity across sectors that support children, parents, and

families. Incorporating lived experiences is viewed as a strength, facilitating the translation of

knowledge into tangible benefits for communities and organizations (Damschroder et al., 2009;

Kerns et al., 2023; Meyers et al., 2012). This transferability can be achieved through a

collaborative working method, where ACs establish close connections with consumers.

AC logic model

Collective action theories propose various factors that motivate individuals to engage with

and commit to a group. Among these factors, efficacy stands out as particularly important, not

only for initial engagement but also for the overall success of collective action (Louis, 2009; Van

Zomeren, 2013). Efficacy refers to one's belief in one's ability to plan and execute steps toward a

goal (Bandura, 1997). In ACs, two different types of efficacies are fostered. The first is

collective efficacy. Collective efficacy presents a sense of social identity and collective agency,

where individuals see themselves as part of the group and believe in the group's ability to take

action together (Louis, 2009; Shteynberg et al., 2022). On the other hand, self-efficacy relates to

a person's confidence in their ability to handle challenges, solve problems, and modify their

behavior effectively to reach their goals (Butler & Schnellert, 2012; Karoly, 1999).

There is a dynamic relationship between individual and collective efficacy. Individuals

with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to trust in their group's ability to act, which in

turn boosts their own confidence (Salanova et al., 2022). Groups that capitalize on their

members' strengths and provide opportunities for individual growth are better able to foster both

individual and group efficacy (Gearhart, 2023). Additionally, trust, shared expectations, and

reciprocity further enhance social connections within the group, enabling better coordination and collaboration toward common goals (Putnam, 2000). The expected outcomes of ACs thus extend beyond just finding solutions to social or political issues; they also include enhancing the capacities of both the group and its members (See Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Procedural guidance for ACs

ACs entail a structured approach to problem-solving and knowledge-sharing. The format and processes of ACs may vary, but typically consist of six steps (Figure 3). Stage 1 involves defining goals, where a group of people come together with a well-defined goal. Each AC addresses one problem until a consensus solution is reached.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Once a goal is identified, the next stage in the AC cycle is to identify and confirm membership. ACs are sometimes established from the beginning when enough members converge with shared goals. However, an individual or a small group often initiates an AC. In these cases, identifying and confirming membership becomes crucial. While a small group is preferable for maintaining manageability and focus, it is essential that membership is diverse enough for ensuring varied input. This balance facilitates a productive and dynamic problem-solving environment, enabling the AC to effectively address its goals and challenges. As membership increases, the group might find that the goals need to be fine-tuned or adjusted to align with the diverse perspectives and expertise of the new members. Therefore, it is essential for each AC to ensure they take adequate time to get consensus on goals and the operational framework of the AC.

Before the first session starts, it is important for ACs to conduct a pre-action assessment (Stage 3). This assessment aims to gauge indicators such as the team's readiness, confidence, and resources available for achieving the set goal. It also serves as a baseline to evaluate the AC's success and provides information to understand areas for improvement in future ACs. Stage 4 is the action phase, where members of the AC meet regularly to work on one facet of the problem. Sessions are pre-planned with a clear agenda. Towards the end of each meeting, the group develops shared action plans for members to work on between meetings. Progress is reviewed at the beginning of each session, fostering continuous momentum and improvement. This model ensures focused discussions, encourages active participation, and facilitates the implementation of actionable solutions toward shared goals.

Each AC comprises three essential roles: the AC chair, the session facilitator, and peer contributors. The AC chair is a dedicated leader responsible for guiding the AC. The chair can be self-appointed or assigned and is expected to bring expertise, offer guidance, and provide insights and solutions relevant to the group's current objectives. They also ensure the group remains focused on its objectives while fostering an atmosphere of openness and acceptance. The second important role to the operation of an AC is the session facilitator. The facilitator ensures the smooth functioning of the AC, manages time and documents meeting minutes. This role can be pre-determined or rotated every meeting. Other group members serve as peer contributors offer constructive feedback, contribute to brainstorming sessions, and share personal insights and experiences to enrich group discussions.

Building trust within ACs is paramount for their effective operation, and one key strategy to achieve this is by establishing clear ground rules before commencing any collaborative efforts. These ground rules foster a culture of mutual respect and non-judgment. Emphasizing open

communication, active listening, and empathy helps cultivate trust and encourages individuals to share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns without fear of criticism or ridicule. This supportive atmosphere enables effective collaboration and problem-solving.

As the AC cycle nears its end, it is crucial for members to commit to deadlines for delivering outcomes (Stage 5). Adhering to these deadlines ensures that all members stay focused and motivated to complete their tasks promptly. This commitment provides a structured timeframe within which specific milestones and goals must be achieved, allowing the group to measure progress and conclude on time. Committing to deliverable outcomes within the set timeframe can help to maintain motivation and productivity throughout the cycle. If certain goals seem unattainable within the pre-agreed timeframe, the ACs might consider breaking down these goals and reserving some for the next AC cycle.

Finally, ACs will conclude with a post-AC assessment activity (Stage 6). This assessment is critical for evaluating the outcomes achieved during the cycle and identifying areas for improvement. The post-AC assessment should involve a thorough review of the goals set at the beginning, the processes followed, and the results obtained. Feedback from all members should be gathered to understand what worked well and what could be improved. This reflective exercise not only validates the efforts of the group but also provides valuable lessons that can enhance the effectiveness of future AC cycles. Additionally, this phase should include planning for the next steps. This planning might involve identifying new goals, reorganizing membership, or refining strategies based on the insights gained during the current cycle. Allowing time for the AC to properly wrap up is essential for concluding the current cycle effectively.

Research Agenda

While there are case studies of the effectiveness of this approach (See Appendix), ACs have not been examined empirically to date. To demonstrate the effectiveness of ACs, a rigorous and content-neutral evaluation framework is necessary, one that can be applied universally across various topics addressed by ACs. Similar to models used in implementation science, the work within ACs unfolds over time, with discernible outcomes at each stage that require clear definition and measurement. These outcomes are multifaceted, reflecting both the process of the ACs and the content it seeks to address.

In order to begin research into ACs, the development of a comprehensive manual detailing the procedures and processes of ACs is a critical step. Such a manual would serve as a foundational tool, providing methods for consistently gathering and analyzing data on process outcomes throughout the lifespan of ACs. Additionally, each AC must define its content-specific outcomes tailored to its particular goals and context. The initial outcomes should encompass the formation of the AC, the delineation of roles within the group, and the identification of the specific issue the AC aims to tackle, including a clear articulation of the intended goals. Fundamental to the success of ACs is the establishment of a trusting and committed relationship among group members, as well as fostering a conducive organizational climate within the ACs, and assessment tools to measure these are essential. Mid-process outcomes are equally vital and involve monitoring progress towards the AC's goals, and pinpointing both the enablers and the obstacles encountered along the way. The culmination of the AC's process should result in the attainment of the set goals, satisfaction among group members, and a strategic roadmap for future ACs. The use of goal-attainment scales (Logan et al., 2022; Shankar et al., 2020) to assess outcomes may be a useful approach in this context, given the uniqueness of goals to each AC.

Research into ACs will necessitate employing a variety of study methods that align with the incremental steps of intervention development. The initial phase of establishing the efficacy of ACs might best be served by qualitative research methodologies, which examine the procedural aspects of AC implementation and its impact on participants. This stage is also an opportunity to fine-tune AC implementation strategies and refine measurement processes. Subsequent research designs, such as single-group pre-post studies, could evaluate changes in outcomes over time within an AC. More advanced research may include randomized controlled trials to assess the unique contributions of the AC process in achieving desired outcomes, as compared to other group work models. Given that ACs may aim to develop interventions or influence policies, time-series designs may be particularly effective in measuring the impact on policy formulation and program development over time. In sum, the pursuit of research on ACs must be methodologically robust, thoughtfully planned, and strategically implemented, ensuring that the findings can inform and optimize the effectiveness of ACs in fostering impactful change in support of children and families.

Recommendation for the Uptake and Sustainability of ACs to Promote Evidence-Based Parenting and Family Support

Efficient and effective implementation of evidence-based parenting and family support interventions is within reach, provided that we engage in strategic, proactive, sustainable, and cooperative efforts. ACs embody these principles and can serve as powerful vehicles for advancing this initiative. There are several practical factors however that we need to carefully consider in order to fully leverage ACs to drive progress.

First, a comprehensive effort to disseminate information and provide training on how to use ACs is essential. This involves creating accessible materials and workshops to train parenting and family support stakeholders on the benefits, practicalities, and procedures of ACs. Equipping individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills can ensure a broader and more effective implementation of ACs. A central repository of resources is crucial for this effort. This repository should include guidelines, tools, templates, and best practices that consumers, practitioners, and researchers can easily access. By providing a one-stop-shop for resources, we can streamline the process and encourage more consistent and effective use of ACs. Additionally, creating a library of successful examples of ACs in action can inspire and guide new initiatives. This library should highlight case studies and success stories from various contexts and communities, showcasing how ACs have made a positive difference. By sharing these examples, we can provide practical insights and encouragement to others looking to implement ACs.

The sustainable and successful deployment of ACs requires ongoing evaluation activities. Building a robust evidence base to demonstrate the effectiveness of ACs is vital. This involves ongoing evaluations and research to gather data on the outcomes and impact of ACs. For this to be feasible, the guidelines for AC training need to include a module to guide assessment and evaluation, and evaluation efforts should be supported and published. By continually assessing and improving, we can ensure that the practice of ACs is constantly enhanced and can build credibility and support.

The initial engagement and motivation for individuals to participate in ACs is an important topic that needs further research. Studies show that people can be motivated to engage in collective action through various means, including personal benefits and social rewards

(Klandermans, 1997), social identities or a sense of belonging to a group (Deaux et al., 2006), collective effectiveness or success in achieving group goals and collective emotions such as anger. While collective action may seem like an exception to everyday life, this view is only one perspective (Klandermans, 1997; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Van Zomeren, 2013). To enhance individual's motivations, it is necessary to expand the concept of collective action from rare, large-scale events to include everyday actions (Van Zomeren, 2013). For example, open and consistent communication among professionals could help with bringing efforts together and needs to be encouraged. Daily exchanges and the sharing of knowledge can also stimulate a process of reflection and motivate individuals to actively participate and champion change (Bonawitz et al., 2020). Researchers and practitioners must also join forces with consumers and policymakers to ensure that ACs' goals are practical, feasible for implementation, and meet the needs of specific communities. Universities and other academic institutions can also fuel the AC movement by hosting events that gather researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to brainstorm and work toward common goals. The inaugural International Congress on Evidence-Based Parenting Support (I-CEPS) event in 2023 exemplified the ACs philosophy by actively encouraging participants to engage with local issues and to form ACs to address specific community challenges.

Nevertheless, the momentum for ACs depends heavily on both policy and funding support. The strongest advancements occur when leaders across research, practice, and policy domains are integrally involved in guiding the movement. Advocating for and communicating with funders and policymakers is necessary as part of ACs to ensure that changes are embedded in funded research, policy directives, and accountability frameworks. The acceleration of ACs requires thoughtful navigation of the political and funding environments, understanding that

funding could fluctuate depending on political restructuring. A strategic financial plan that includes varied funding sources—diversified across government and non-profit sectors—can offer ACs not only policy advocacy but also protection against the unpredictable nature of government shifts.

Conclusions

In this paper, we highlighted the substantial potential of ACs as a framework for driving social and policy impact within evidence-based parenting support. We elucidated how ACs synergize collective action, implementation science, and socio-ecological research to address the urgent need for cohesive, strategic movements that can significantly improve the quality of life for children, parents, and families. The successful application of ACs necessitates a theoretically robust, yet practical framework that goes beyond the mere aggregation of policies and practices. As we look ahead, a research agenda that focuses on the procedural guidance for ACs, the evaluation of their effectiveness, and the exploration of their long-term impact is critical. This research will undoubtedly require diverse methodologies to fully capture the dynamic nature of ACs and their potential to foster enduring change. It is through the meticulous application and thorough evaluation of such innovative models that we can hope to bridge the gap between research and practice and, ultimately, improve the wellbeing of children, parents, and families at a population level.

APPENDIX

Example of Successful ACs to Promote Evidence-Based Practice to Support Children and Families

**Case 1. The Creation of the Parenting and Family Research Alliance**

The Parenting and Family Research Alliance began in February 2020 as an informal collaboration between leading researchers in parenting and family intervention in Australia (see Sanders et al, 2024). PAFRA became a registered charity in 2022. The alliance is a policy advocacy group that aims to enhance the policy and social impact of parenting and family intervention research. The work of PAFRA as an organization has been strongly influenced by the principles of Action Circles and the PAFRA board voted to adopt Action Circles as a primary method of establishing and operating working groups to advance PAFRA's mission. The PAFRA-sponsored inaugural International Congress on Evidence-Based Parenting Support in 2023 (https://www.pafra.org/congress-2023) provided guidance on how to establish and run a successful action circle to influence policy or practice via a specially prepared instructional video (https://www.pafra.org/congress-2023) and tipsheet.

PAFRA Action Circles were established focused on issues related to parenting and family research and practice in Australia. Each of these ACs has been characterized by having a lead facilitator, a clear focus, a limited timeframe, and a tangible outcome or product that was produced. Some ACs have continued or been reformed with additional or replaced members after the attainment of the initial goal. Some of the outcomes produced by PAFRA ACs include advocacy papers calling for changing legislation relating to corporal punishment of children in Australia (Havighurst et al., 2023), improving parental access to evidence-based parenting support through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (Mazzucchelli et al., 2023)

(Mazzucchelli et al., 2023), and increasing federal funding of research on evidence-based parenting supports (Havighurst et al., 2022).

Case 2. Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

The American National Foundation to End Child Abuse and Neglect (EndCAN) is an organization that links more than forty organizations working to prevent child abuse and neglect. EndCAN created two ACs to explore how they could accelerate prevention. One AC focused on recommending policies that have the biggest impact. The other focused on how collaboration among child serving organizations could be improved. More than 20 experts on the problem participated in the ACs. The product of this work was a monograph documenting the fact that child abuse and neglect is a risk factor for virtually all the psychological, behavioural, and health problems that undermine health and wellbeing. It outlined how EndCAN organizations could increase impact via five initiatives: (a) increasing research on the prevention of child abuse and neglect; (b) strengthening media advocacy; (c) mobilizing the legal profession to improve the child protective system; (d) mobilizing the health care and human services systems to make prevention and treatment a higher priority in the training and credentialling of professions that can impact child abuse and neglect; and (e) promoting civic engagement to advocate for, and enact effective policy. A survey of AC members showed that most agreed or strongly agreed that their voice was heard and that their work on the AC would make an important contribution to reducing abuse and neglect.
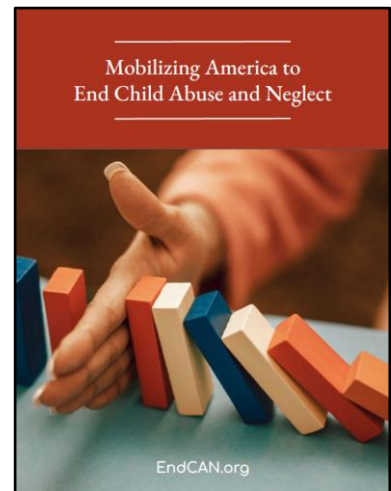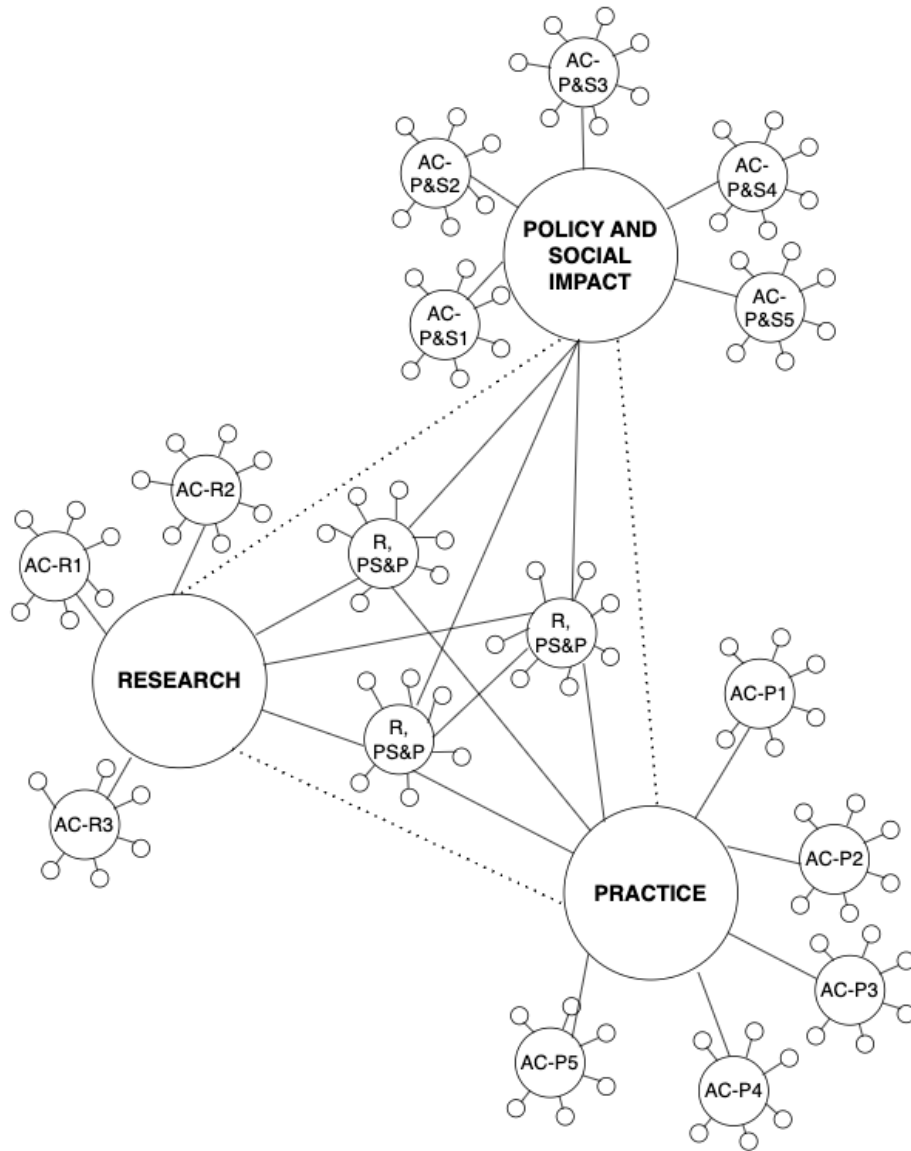
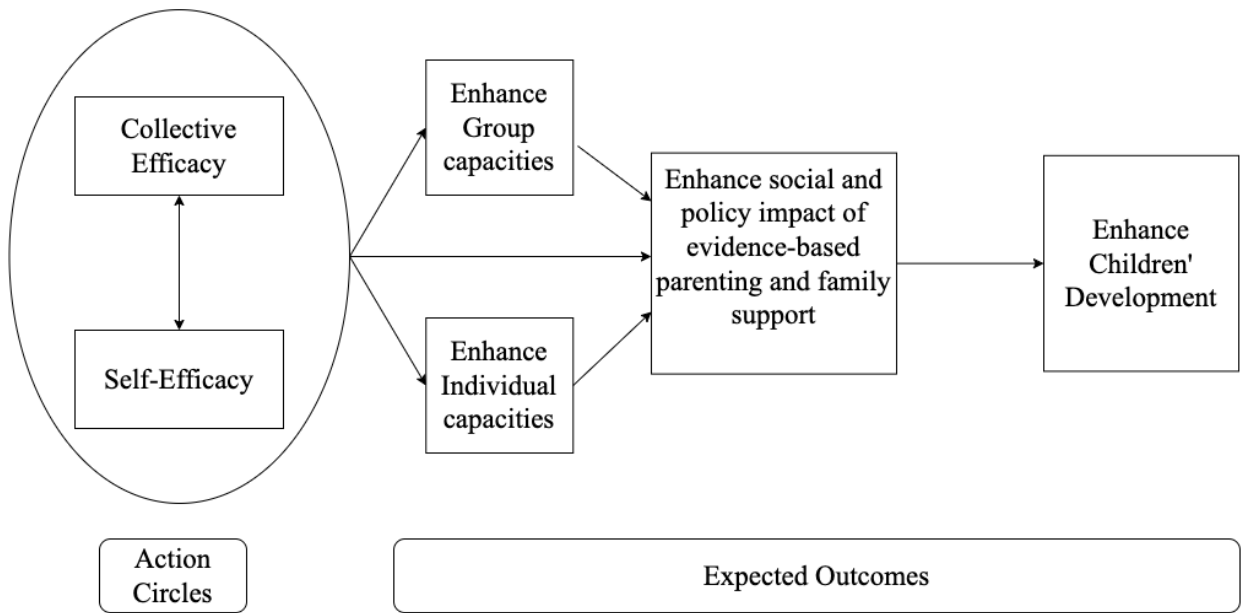**Figure 1**. Example of an Action Circles network, comprising clusters of ACs on Policy and

Social Impact, Research, and Practice.

Note. AC- Action Circles. P- Practice, R- Research, P&S- Policy and Social Impact.

 Largest circles indicate ACs clusters (e.g., Research); medium circles indicate ACs (e.g., AC-

R1), smallest circles indicate AC members.

Figure 2. Action Circles Logic Model
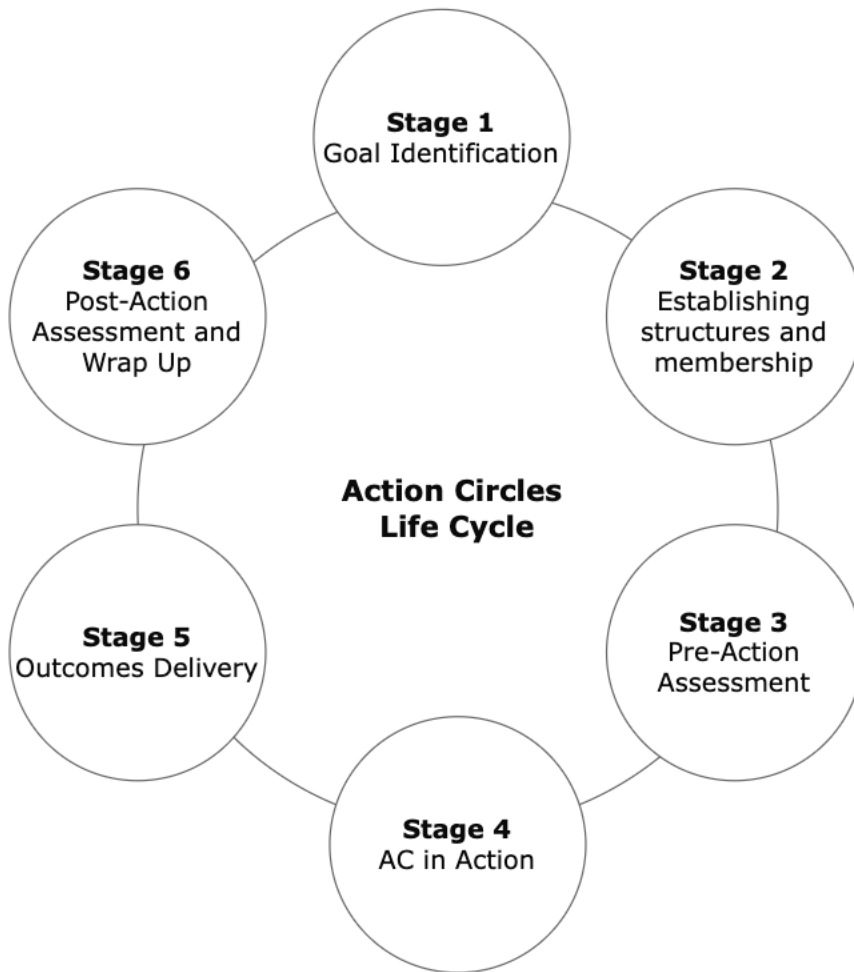
Figure 3: Action Circles Life Cycle

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Chat GPT in order to correct grammar error and improve readability of the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the author(s) have carefully reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the published article.

References

Anderson, P., Chisholm, D., & Fuhr, D. C. (2009). Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of policies and programmes to reduce the harm caused by alcohol. *The lancet*, *373*(9682), 2234-2246.

Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy the exercise of control. New York: H. *Freeman & Co. Student Success*, *333*, 48461.

Bonawitz, K., Wetmore, M., Heisler, M., Dalton, V. K., Damschroder, L. J., Forman, J., Allan, K. R., & Moniz, M. H. (2020). Champions in context: which attributes matter for change efforts in healthcare? *Implementation Science*, *15*, 1-10.

Butler, D. L., & Schnellert, L. (2012). Collaborative inquiry in teacher professional development. *Teaching and teacher education*, *28*(8), 1206-1220.

C. Fong, V., & Iarocci, G. (2020). Child and family outcomes following pandemics: A systematic review and recommendations on COVID-19 policies. *Journal of pediatric psychology*, *45*(10), 1124-1143.

Damschroder, L. J., Aron, D. C., Keith, R. E., Kirsh, S. R., Alexander, J. A., & Lowery, J. C. (2009). Fostering implementation of health services research findings into practice: a consolidated framework for advancing implementation science. *Implementation Science*, *4*, 1-15.

Deaux, K., Reid, A., Martin, D., & Bikmen, N. (2006). Ideologies of diversity and inequality: Predicting collective action in groups varying in ethnicity and immigrant status. *Political Psychology*, *27*(1), 123-146.

Delina, L. L., & Diesendorf, M. (2016). Strengthening the climate action movement: strategies from contemporary social action campaigns. *Interface*, *8*(1), 117-141.

Domlyn, A. M., Scott, V., Livet, M., Lamont, A., Watson, A., Kenworthy, T., Talford, M., Yannayon, M., & Wandersman, A. (2021). R= MC2 readiness building process: A practical approach to support implementation in local, state, and national settings. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *49*(5), 1228-1248.

Doyle, F. L., Morawska, A., Higgins, D. J., Havighurst, S. S., Mazzucchelli, T. G., Toumbourou, J. W., Middeldorp, C. M., Chainey, C., Cobham, V. E., & Harnett, P. (2022). Policies are needed to increase the reach and impact of evidence-based parenting supports: A call for a population-based approach to supporting parents, children, and families. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 1-14.

Durrant, J. E. (2022). Corporal punishment: From ancient history to global progress. *Handbook of interpersonal violence and abuse across the lifespan: A project of the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan (NPEIV)*, 343-365.

Fixsen, D. L. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature*. National Implementation Research Network.

Flaskerud, J. H. (2023). Post-pandemic psychosocial issues. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, *44*(2), 130-133.

Gearhart, M. C. (2023). Mutual efficacy, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy theory: An examination of empowerment and activism. *Social Work*, *68*(3), 192-200.

Gonzalez, C., Morawska, A., & Haslam, D. M. (2018). Enhancing initial parental engagement in interventions for parents of young children: A systematic review of experimental studies. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, *21*, 415-432.

Gonzalez, J. C., Klein, C. C., Barnett, M. L., Schatz, N. K., Garoosi, T., Chacko, A., & Fabiano, G. A. (2023). Intervention and implementation characteristics to enhance father engagement: a systematic review of parenting interventions. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, *26*(2), 445-458.

Gulliver, R., Fielding, K. S., & Louis, W. R. (2021). Assessing the mobilization potential of environmental advocacy communication. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *74*, 101563.

Havighurst, S. S., Chainey, C., Doyle, F. L., Higgins, D. J., Mathews, B., Mazzucchelli, T. G., Zimmer-Gembeck, M., Andriessen, K., Cobham, V. E., & Cross, D. (2022). A review of Australian Government funding of parenting intervention research. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*, *46*(3), 262-268.

Havighurst, S. S., Mathews, B., Doyle, F. L., Haslam, D. M., Andriessen, K., Cubillo, C., Dawe, S., Hawes, D. J., Leung, C., & Mazzucchelli, T. G. (2023). Corporal punishment of children in Australia: The evidence-based case for legislative reform. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*, *47*(3), 100044.

Hornsey, M. J., Blackwood, L., Louis, W., Fielding, K., Mavor, K., Morton, T., O'Brien, A., Paasonen, K. E., Smith, J., & White, K. M. (2006). Why do people engage in collective action? Revisiting the role of perceived effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *36*(7), 1701-1722.

Karoly, P. (1999). A goal systems–self-regulatory perspective on personality, psychopathology, and change. *Review of general psychology*, *3*(4), 264-291.

Kerkhoff, A. D., Farrand, E., Marquez, C., Cattamanchi, A., & Handley, M. A. (2022). Addressing health disparities through implementation science—a need to integrate an equity lens from the outset. *Implementation Science*, *17*(1), 13.

Kerns, S. E., Mitchell, C., Rolls Reutz, J. A., & Sedivy, J. A. (2023). Documenting the Implementation Gap: Pre-implementation Supports. *Global Implementation Research and Applications*, *3*(2), 85-98.

Klandermans, P. G. (1997). The social psychology of protest.

Logan, B., Jegatheesan, D., Viecelli, A., Pascoe, E., & Hubbard, R. (2022). Goal attainment scaling as an outcome measure for randomised controlled trials: a scoping review. *BMJ Open*, *12*(7), e063061. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2022-063061

Louis, W. R. (2009). Collective action—and then what? *Journal of Social Issues*, *65*(4), 727-748.

[Record #43 is using a reference type undefined in this output style.]

Meyers, D. C., Durlak, J. A., & Wandersman, A. (2012). The quality implementation framework: a synthesis of critical steps in the implementation process. *American journal of community psychology*, *50*, 462-480.

Moullin, J. C., Dickson, K. S., Stadnick, N. A., Becan, J. E., Wiley, T., Phillips, J., Hatch, M., & Aarons, G. A. (2020). Exploration, preparation, implementation, sustainment (EPIS) framework. *Handbook on implementation science*, 32-61.

Nilsen, P. (2020). Making sense of implementation theories, models, and frameworks. *Implementation Science 3.0*, 53-79.

Panchal, U., Salazar de Pablo, G., Franco, M., Moreno, C., Parellada, M., Arango, C., & Fusar-Poli, P. (2023). The impact of COVID-19 lockdown on child and adolescent mental health: systematic review. *European child & adolescent psychiatry*, *32*(7), 1151-1177.

Polanczyk, G. V., Salum, G. A., Sugaya, L. S., Caye, A., & Rohde, L. A. (2015). Annual research review: A meta-analysis of the worldwide prevalence of mental disorders in children and adolescents. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, *56*(3), 345-365.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. In *Culture and politics: A reader* (pp. 223-234). Springer.

Salanova, M., Rodríguez-Sánchez, A. M., & Nielsen, K. (2022). The impact of group efficacy beliefs and transformational leadership on followers' self-efficacy: A multilevel-longitudinal study. *Current Psychology*, *41*(4), 2024-2033.

Samji, H., Wu, J., Ladak, A., Vossen, C., Stewart, E., Dove, N., Long, D., & Snell, G. (2022). Mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and youth–a systematic review. *Child and adolescent mental health*, *27*(2), 173-189.

Shankar, S., Marshall, S. K., & Zumbo, B. D. (2020). A systematic review of validation practices for the goal attainment scaling measure. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *38*(2), 236-255. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282919840948

Shapiro, C. J., Prinz, R. J., & Sanders, M. R. (2012). Facilitators and barriers to implementation of an evidence-based parenting intervention to prevent child maltreatment: The Triple P-Positive Parenting Program. *Child maltreatment*, *17*(1), 86-95.

Shteynberg, G., Hirsh, J. B., Garthoff, J., & Bentley, R. A. (2022). Agency and identity in the collective self. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *26*(1), 35-56.

Simon, B., & Klandermans, B. (2001). Politicized collective identity: A social psychological analysis. *American Psychologist*, *56*(4), 319.

Smith, J. D., Cruden, G. H., Rojas, L. M., Van Ryzin, M., Fu, E., Davis, M. M., Landsverk, J., & Brown, C. H. (2020). Parenting Interventions in Pediatric Primary Care: A Systematic Review. *Pediatrics*, *146*(1). https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-3548

Trischler, J., Dietrich, T., & Rundle-Thiele, S. (2019). Co-design: from expert-to user-driven ideas in public service design. *Public management review*, *21*(11), 1595-1619.

Van Zomeren, M. (2013). Four core social-psychological motivations to undertake collective action. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *7*(6), 378-388.

Vasileva, M., Graf, R. K., Reinelt, T., Petermann, U., & Petermann, F. (2021). Research review: A meta-analysis of the international prevalence and comorbidity of mental disorders in children between 1 and 7 years. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, *62*(4), 372-381.

Weisenmuller, C., & Hilton, D. (2021). Barriers to access, implementation, and utilization of parenting interventions: Considerations for research and clinical applications. *American Psychologist*, *76*(1), 104.

White, J. W., & Geffner, R. (2022). Fundamentals of Understanding Interpersonal Violence and Abuse: Integrating Research, Practice, Advocacy, and Policy to Connect Agendas and Forge New Directions. *Handbook of interpersonal violence and abuse across the lifespan: A project of the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan (NPEIV)*, 3-26.

Wright, S. C., Taylor, D. M., & Moghaddam, F. M. (1990). Responding to membership in a disadvantaged group: From acceptance to collective protest. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *58*(6), 994.

Zolotor, A. J., & Puzia, M. E. (2010). Bans against corporal punishment: A systematic review of the laws, changes in attitudes and behaviours. *Child abuse review*, *19*(4), 229-247.