

Supporting Families of young children with Special Educational Needs in early stage: Insights from E-PATS Programm adaptation in Geneva

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INTRODUCTION

Parents of children with special needs face multiple challenges affecting family life, mental health, employment, and financial stability, placing them at increased vulnerability compared to other families.

While educational services supporting child development are widely developed and studied, **programs specifically designed to support parents**, especially during the early stages of their parenting experience **remain limited**.

E-PAtS is a Parent-Support program built to address this gap. In Geneva, a collaboration between Fondation 022 Familles and the University of Geneva led to the implementation of E-PAtS.

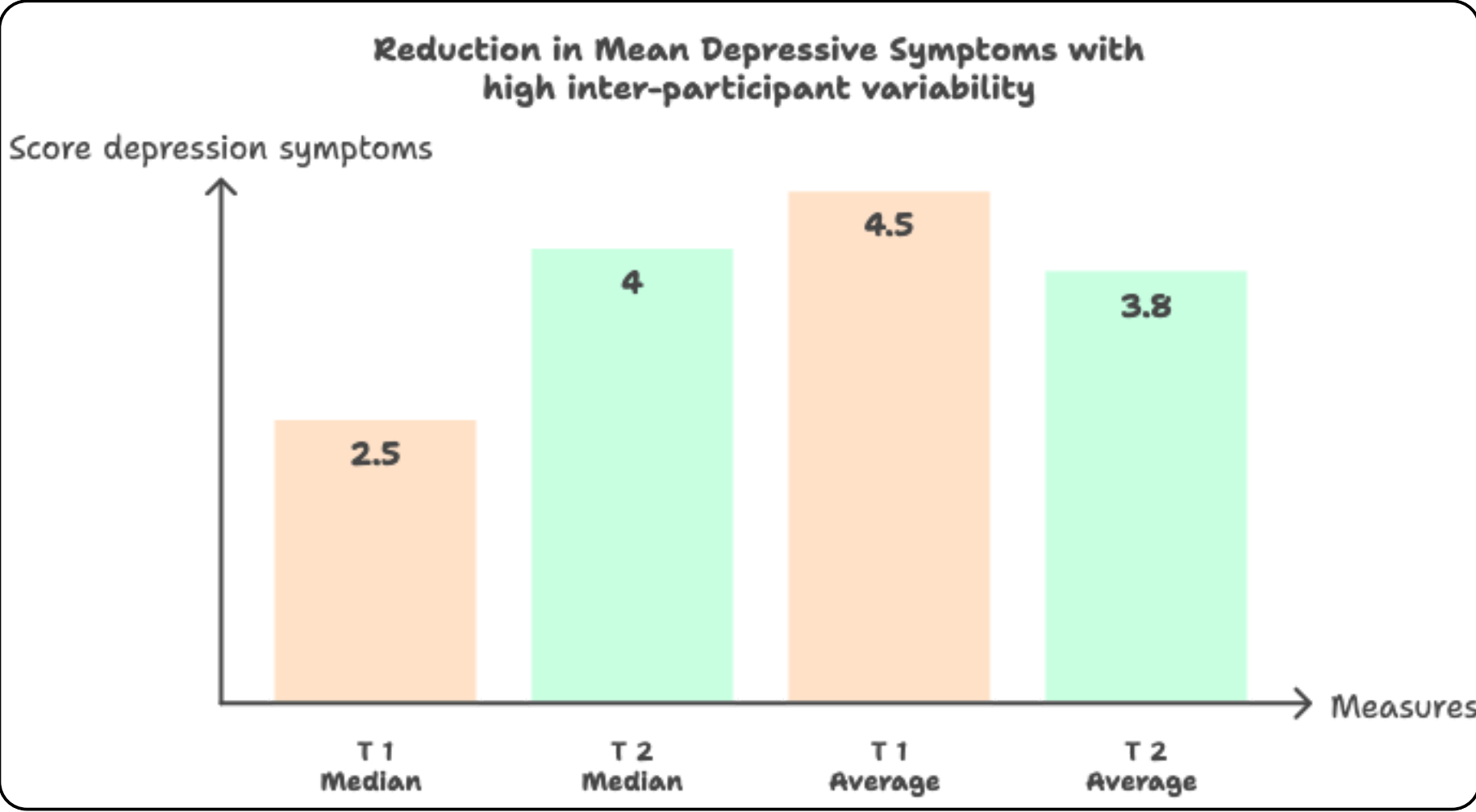
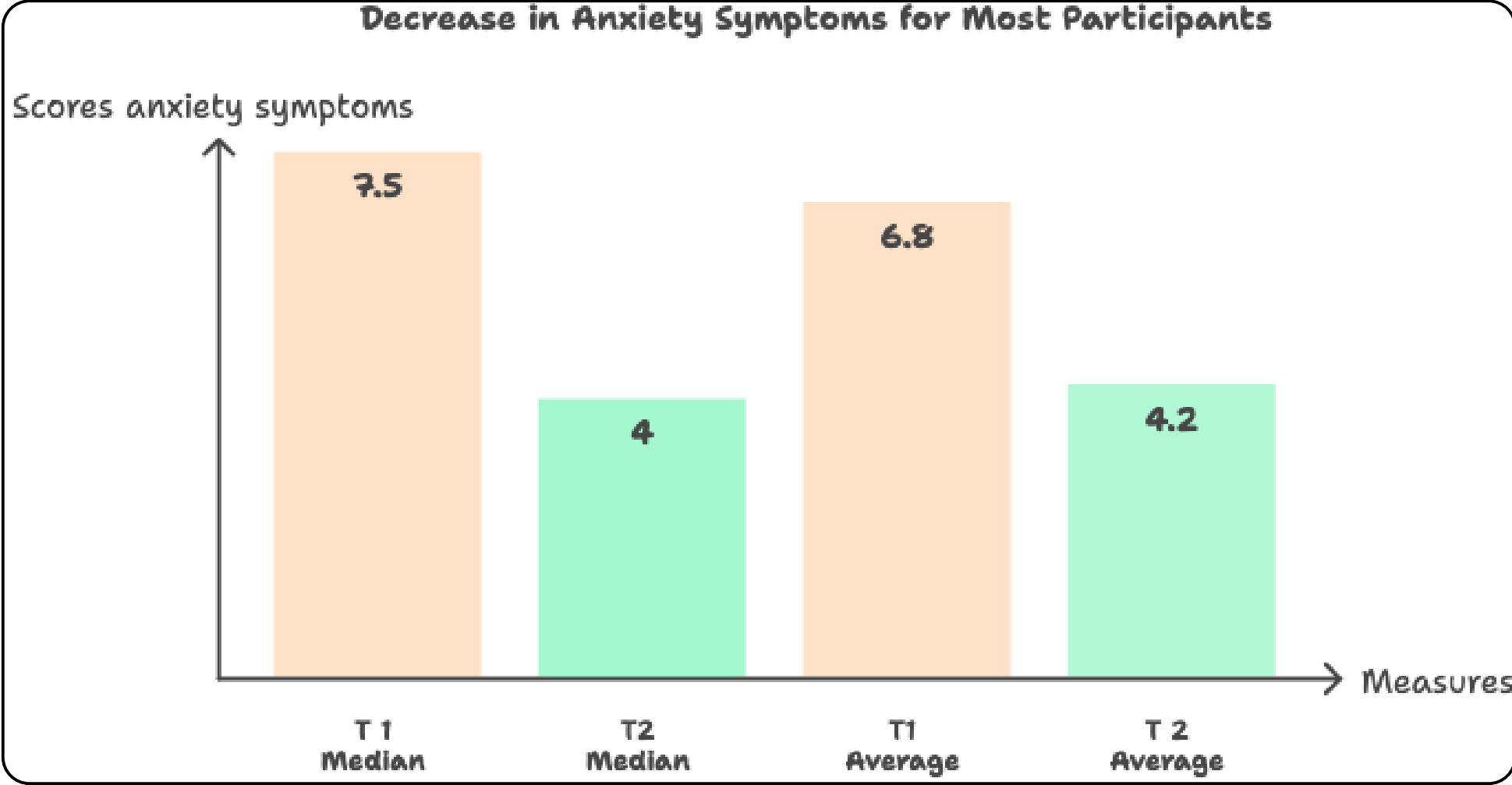
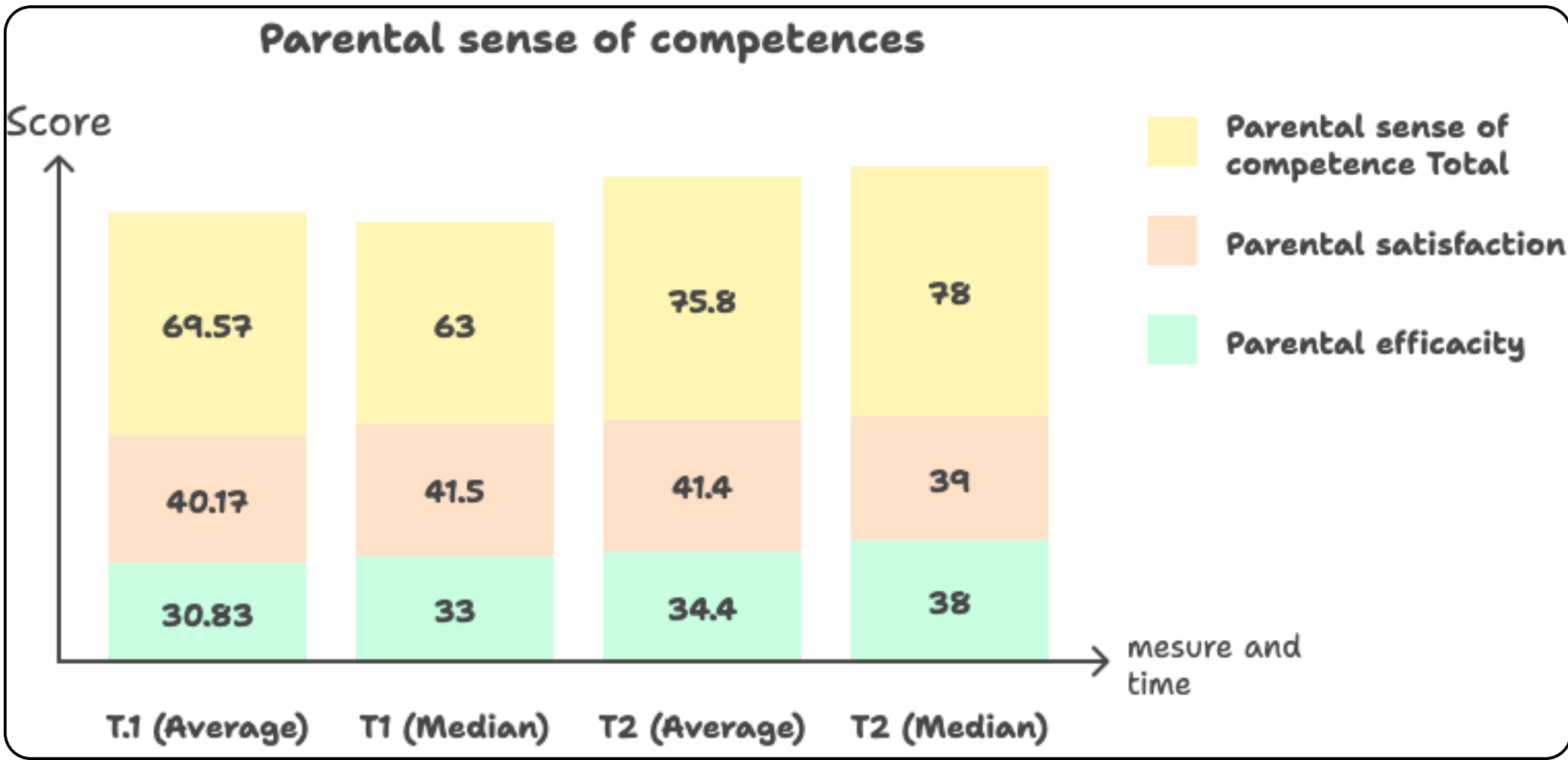
Objective: Presents results from the pilot phase, understand the effects of E-PAtS on participants.

Participants: 8 Mothers of young children with ASD or genetic syndrome.

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics (small sample size) and Thematic analysis.

Methodology: Design mixt. Pre-post intervention: T1 & T2 : Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale. Parenting Sense of Competence Scale, Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale. T2: satisfaction, cohesion group questionnaire and interview.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS: Overall positive impact, as shown in the charts. In addition to the results shown in the graphs: overall well-being increased from 57.6 to 59.4. Participants also reported high satisfaction and strong group cohesion.



QUALITATIVE RESULTS:

Four main themes emerged from the post-program interviews, highlighting several important elements that illustrate the effects and mechanisms of the program.

“Before, I felt alone with my problems; now I no longer feel alone.”

“I don’t feel alone anymore.”
“There is support that comes from the heart”.
“We felt like we were with our mothers.”

Reduced Isolation
Mothers feel less alone and more connected to others.

Feeling Understood
Mothers feel safe to express emotions without judgment.
“We could speak freely, without judgment.”
“It’s a mental relief (...) and feel understood”.
“I felt guilty; now, thanks to the group (...) I know it’s not because of me (the diagnosis)”.

“I can now go out with both my children”
“Now I’ve learned that I need to try to let her do certain things, so I’m trying”

Practical Learning
Mothers acquire useful strategies for parenting.

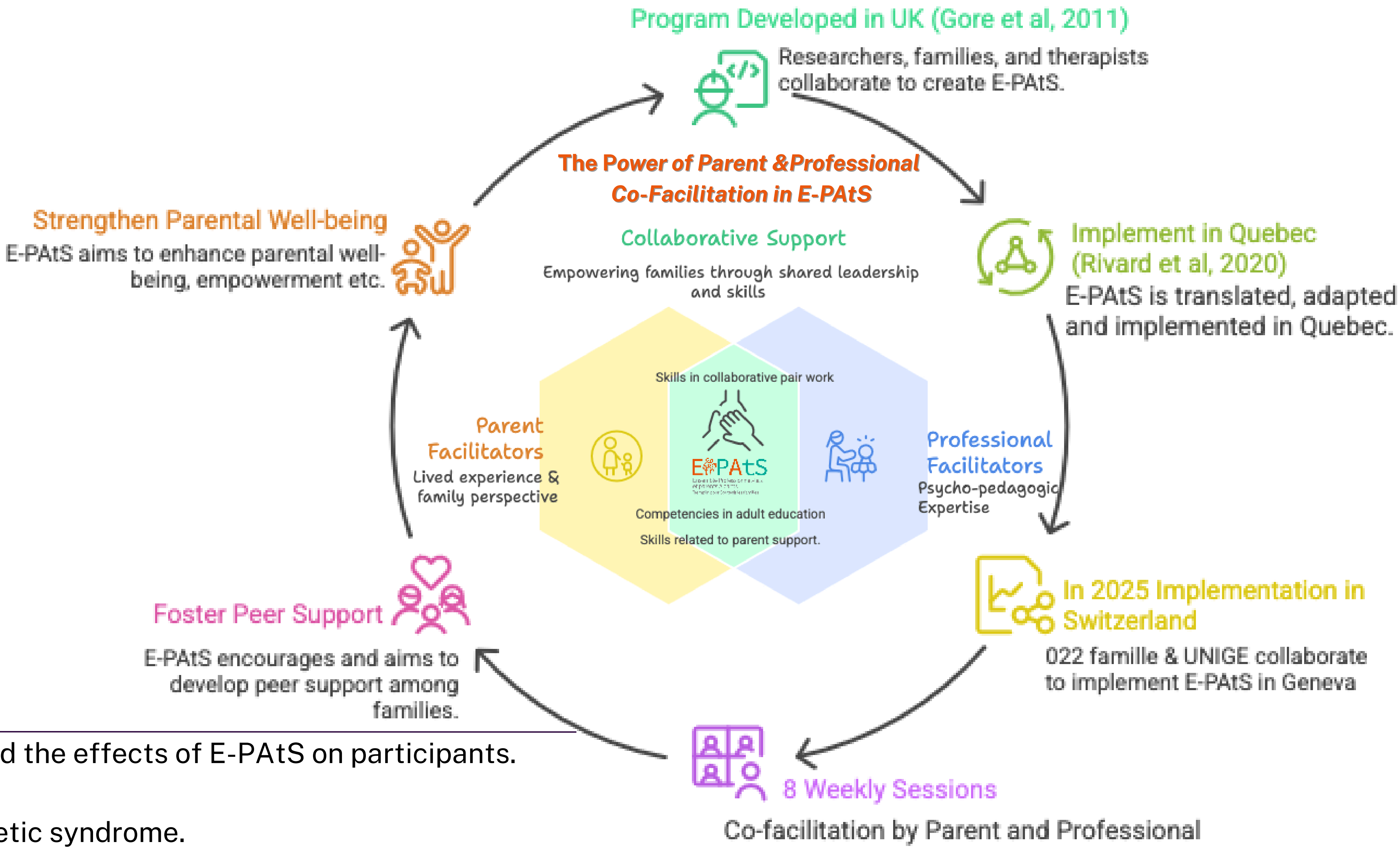
Maintain Social Link
Mothers desire to stay connected after the program.

“I wish the program could continue, even once a month, to stay connected.”
“We need more meetings”
“No, it wasn’t too long, we could have had more meetings”

CONCLUSION

- This results suggests that E-PAtS improves parental well-being, sense of parental competence, and reduces anxiety symptoms. These findings are consistent with previous results from the UK and Quebec.
- Inter-individual variability was observed, particularly in depressive symptoms and parental satisfaction, suggesting the need for complementary or earlier support for some parents.
- Qualitative analyses highlight key mechanisms of change, including reduced feelings of loneliness, feeling understood, peer connections, and access to practical and effective strategies.
- E-PAtS provides multidimensional support: emotional, instrumental, and peer support, and addresses more than parenting skills compared to traditional programs.
- Future work should focus on: long-term effects, role of peer interactions, and recognition of parent facilitators competences.

To support families through a holistic and inclusive approach, E-PAtS in Geneva is being extended to examine parents facilitators competences and the program’s effects on parents and facilitators.



RELATED LITERATURE

Coulman, E., Gore, N., Moody, G. ... & Hastings, R. (2022). Early positive approaches to support for families of young children with intellectual disability: the E-PATS feasibility RCT. Public Health Research, 10(2).

Chatenoud C., Rivard, M., Millau, M., & Mestari, Z. (2025). Family Needs and Service Trajectory During the Transition to School for Children With Autism. Families in Society.

Gore, N., Bradshaw, J., Hastings, R., Sweeney, J., & Austin, D. (2022). E-PAtS: Qualitative experiences of a new support programme for family caregivers of young children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 35(3), 889-899.

Rivard, M., Boulé, M., Morin, J., & Bradshaw, J. (2025). E-PAtS for Family Carers of Young Children with Developmental Disabilities: Adaptation and Piloting in Quebec Public Services. Frontiers in rehabilitation sciences, 6, 1627502

More informations about the project:

www.epats-ge.ch