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# **THE EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT FATHER**

**The experience of planning and facilitating a fathers' peer support group at Familia ry with the development of participants' emotional self-awareness skills**

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## ABSTRACT

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“The emotionally intelligent father” The experience of planning and facilitating a fathers’ peer support group at Familia ry with the development of participants’ emotional self-awareness skills

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This thesis development project based took into consideration the Finnish social context, in which it is expected that fathers further involve in children’s care as a way of balancing responsibilities between both parents, promoting non-discrimination and equality in working life, and also reducing pay differences between sexes.

Concerning that background, a gap was identified between the social expectations and the actual availability of emotional skills that men have to engage in their fatherhood role. Hence, the project development aimed at supporting fathers in improving their emotional intelligence, which can lead to further emotional involvement with children’s care. An increase in participants’ wellbeing was also expected.

The project was developed and implemented in partnership with Familia ry, and thus fathers reached by its networking were the target group. As a result, a peer support group was planned and carried out in a total of 7 sessions between April and May 2022. The meetings were led considering the development of tools and discussions focusing on raising emotional self-awareness among participants while discussing common issues related to fatherhood. Emotional Intelligence and Nonviolent Communication were the main frameworks developed within the sessions.

The tools and discussions lead to high sharing engagement of peers during the meetings. Fathers reported having further understanding and a new awareness of the importance of recognizing emotions while developing further their fatherhood. Participants’ feedback was collected through individual and group discussions. Recommendations were made and discussed with the partner organization so that participants’ needs could be better addressed in future projects.

Keywords: Fathers’ involvement, Peer support groups, Emotional Self-awareness, Nonviolent Communication

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Fathers' role in families has been significantly changing over the decades, as we can observe in the so-called modern societies. Nowadays in Finland, well-established values of non-discrimination and gender equality have been influencing this new paradigm. As a result, the Finnish family leave reform that entered into force in August 2022 established the following objectives to be accomplished: “to divide family leave and care responsibilities equally between both parents in a family, to strengthen non-discrimination and equality in working life and to reduce pay differences between the sexes” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriön [STM], 2022).

Although this new legislation (STM, 2022) predicts that both parents will have an equal quota of daily allowance, which makes it possible for fathers to stay longer with their children at home, with financial assistance secured, little has been debated about the social services that will be provided to support fathers in engaging emotionally into the fatherhood. Considering this gap, I identified new possibilities for providing a peer group aiming to support fathers in improving their emotional intelligence, expecting their engagement in their fatherhood. This is the context of my development-orientated thesis.

While reflecting on better strategies for the aims of this project development, I concluded that a peer support group would be an interesting working method choice. In my understanding, peer groups have various possibilities of embracing theories, social work tools, and values that are aligned with social services' scope, which is certainly related to engaging “people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing” (IFSW, 2022).

As the theoretical background for informing the project's goals and objectives, I concluded that Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 2020) would be the most aligned with those aspirations. For the development of activities and tools for enhancing emotional self-awareness skills in participants, within a safe space, the

Non-violent Communication (Rosenberg, 2015) framework was the choice. The reasons for that will be addressed in Chapter 3.

The chosen work-life partner was Familia ry. This organization promotes the well-being of intercultural families in Finland, and it has been on my networking list for some time. Familia offered services that were important to support my well-being while facing the challenges of moving to this new country, back in 2016.

The project will consider the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a peer support group targeting fathers reached out by its network. Familia has been implementing a father's peer group since 2018. With that in mind, this new project was designed to add value to that expertise by offering and assessing a new approach to facilitating and guiding peers' discussions, which will be the emotional intelligence framework, more specifically on the development of emotional self-awareness skills.

This new peer group will aim to increase participants' emotional vocabulary and emotional self-awareness while discussing topics related to fatherhood (the topics will be like the ones developed in previous groups with the new awareness and focus on emotions). It is expected that peers will understand common factors behind a group of emotions and how to constructively act on them, which aims to promote emotional engagement with their children. Furthermore, from the group's listening and sharing dynamics, it is expected that individuals increase empathy, empowerment, and overall well-being. The project will be called "Duo Fathers' Group: the emotionally intelligent father".

## 2 BACKGROUND

As a background of this development-orientated thesis, initially, I will present a modern understanding of fatherhood, clarifying relevant differences between fathers' roles in the past and nowadays, and how this change can positively affect

children's lives. I will then address the reasons behind the Finnish family leave reform (STM, 2022) that entered force in August 2022, and what that has to say about the current situation of fathers in Finland. After presenting the current situation, I will finally discuss the challenges that fathers might be facing and opportunities to be taken into consideration.

## 2.1 Fatherhood involvement and its impact on children's lives

Fatherhood relates to expectations of men's gender roles and parental involvement in children's upbringing. With that in mind, it is important to clarify that father and fatherhood are not easy concepts to be universally defined and they must be understood in a cultural context, which can change from society to society, besides being historically set. To corroborate, according to Miller (2011, 1), "ideas and practices around fathering, just like mothering, have always been subject to change, and research has illuminated its diverse historical, cultural and social dimensions".

Fathers' emotional involvement with their offspring is relatively new when compared with motherhood (Parker & Wang, 2013). The discourse of the modern father relates ideally to values of emotional engagement, involvement, being active, sensitive, and intimate related to their kids' caring, in contrast with the old model of fatherhood as an economic provision (Miller 2011, 7). In that sense, fatherhood is somewhere nowadays set between a past in which parents were not emotionally engaged and a new reality in which their involvement is socially emphasized. To clarify, Eerola (2015, p. 79) stresses: "it seems that fathers have moved closer towards the intimate and emotional core of the family, and fatherhood has become a life domain in which men are allowed, even required, to show their emotions and act in many ways that run counter to what has traditionally been understood as masculine".

An essential aspect of the change in fatherhood role is related to evidence-based positive effects of fathers' involvement in children's lives. A collection of research done by Allen and Daly (2007) shows that children of highly involved fathers are

more cognitively competent, more resilient in the face of stressful situations, and more curious and eager to explore the environment. Furthermore, with fathers' emotional engagement in their offspring's lives, it was demonstrated that children's overall life satisfaction is higher and they experience less depression, it is positively correlated with children's overall social competence, social initiative, social maturity, and capacity for relatedness with others, and it is also associated with less substance abuse among adolescents (Allen & Daly, 2007).

More than presenting justifications regarding the important aspects of fathers' engagement in children's lives, another essential discussion is around the effects of fatherhood involvement on the societal level, in other words, how fathers' engagement in childcare has broader effects in gender equality, family balance, and work life. Those correlations will be clarified in the following subchapter. I will also present next the reasons behind Finland implementing the family leave reform (STM, 2022), a discussion that will also better clarify the societal picture of the current situation informing this project's scope.

## 2.2 Societal context and fatherhood: the Finnish family leave reform

The reason for considering the Finnish context is to better understand the needs of the target group, which are fathers of intercultural families living in Finland (target group and stakeholders will be clarified in Chapter 6). I, therefore, did some research aiming to increase awareness of the overall current situation locally. I observed through the literature review that the Finnish background has similarities to the other Nordic societies (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2015). It is well known that these countries are highly economically developed states in which the welfare policies aim to consider social justice and gender equality as important societal values. Hence, fathers in Finland are expected to participate in a more gender-balanced distribution of childcare (Eerola, 2014).

This scenario can be better understood within a broader family dynamic context. For instance, parenting engagement for mothers and fathers is defined by the choices and constraints regarding the responsibilities of caring for and providing



for their offspring, which relates to the domains of home and paid work (Miller 2011, 7). In Finnish governmental policies, it is observable efforts to embrace the balance of childcare between parents, so that mothers can reduce the gap in the paid work domain.

The new Family leave reform (STM, 2022) that entered into force in August 2022 is a clear example of this paradigm shift as it predicts an equal quota of parental leave for mothers and fathers while increasing the number of parental leave days. Important to be emphasized the objectives set by the government with this legislative act (STM, 2022): “to divide family leave and care responsibilities equally between both parents in a family, to strengthen non-discrimination and equality in working life and to reduce pay differences between the sexes.”

Terveystieteiden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos (THL, 2022), the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare in English, while presenting statistics from the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, demonstrated the unbalanced aspects that involve fathers and mothers regarding childcare. Some of the most important facts that justify legislation (STM, 2022) aims at changing the current situation are: first, mothers use the majority of family leave. In numbers, this means that, in 2021, 42 percent of all parental allowance recipients were men, but only 11 percent of parental allowance days were taken by men. Moreover, also in 2021, women used 97 percent of the parental allowance days that can be shared between parents; second, a fifth of fathers do not take family leave at all. For instance, in a Nordic comparison, Finnish fathers are at the tail end in terms of parental leave; third, 92 percent of those taking care of a child with home care support are women (THL, 2022).

### 2.3 Fathers' specific needs, gaps, and opportunities

On the one hand, fathers' role is changing towards more caring and nurturing-oriented practices than used to be in the past, which can bring enormous positive effects on children's lives, and Finnish society emphasizes and promotes this change while reforming its family leave legislation (STM, 2022), on the other hand, I argue that there is a gap between what is emotionally expected from

fathers nowadays and what are their actual emotional and psychological resources available for engaging in the desired change. This gap is an important justification for this project's implementation, and I will be clarifying it next.

Fathers are the target group and main beneficiaries of the project's outcomes. It is important therefore to acknowledge their specific needs due to the new expectations about fatherhood involvement. In that regard, this development-orientated thesis started with me wondering: do the fathers in Finland have emotionally specific support groups and tools to meet the new expectations around modern fatherhood? After doing my research on the social services offered by Finish public health care system and other non-profit organizations including Familia, Miessakit, and Refugee Council, in despite of general peer activities groups offers, I have not found any supporting group with a clear purpose of tackling the emotional issues around fathers' involvement.

In that sense, this gap was acknowledged as a valuable resource of opportunity for this development-project thesis. So that fathers could be specifically supported in engaging in their fatherhood, I wondered next, what would be fathers' needs that once met could lead to developing their further emotional engagement?

In my efforts to identify those needs, I have not found any research or reports specifically tackling them. However, I found literature on the benefits of a father's involvement in children and family life (Allen & Daly, 2007), which has been previously described in subchapter 2.1. As it was mentioned, Allen and Daly's (2007) literature review offered many important clues about how relevant it is fathers' presence in children's well-being, nonetheless, it did not inform what are the hindrances to fathers' involvement. With that in mind, my next question was, what would then prevent fathers from being more present and willing to connect emotionally with their children? I found a possible answer in masculinity studies: men have been socialized into male roles, portrayed by rationality and emotional invulnerability, and they may conceal emotions in social relations to reinforce expectations of their strength in suppressing it in opposition to being emotionally vulnerable seen (River & Flood, 2021).

Reflecting on this matter with colleagues and other father friends, I concluded that the needs behind fathers' emotional involvement hindrances can be set in the basic, but essential, level of men accepting and welcoming emotions, in opposition to the old gender model of emotions equals weakness. Feeling and recognizing emotions are important to establish caring and meaningful connections (McLaren, 2010). In other words, supporting fathers in developing their emotional awareness skills, as a healthy sign of power and willingness to connect with their children, is one of the main needs behind fathers' involvement. This became the project's purpose and motivation for implementing a peer group with specific objectives, which will be further clarified in Chapter 4.

### 3 KEY CONCEPTS

The peer support group is the main social working method involved in this development-project thesis, and therefore one of the main key concepts to be clarified in this chapter. Emotional intelligence and nonviolent communication frameworks are the main theoretical background and important references for developing the tools to be used and implemented within the peer group activities, aiming at the increase of self-awareness in participants. These are the key concepts behind the thesis. In the following subchapters, I will introduce those concepts while reflecting on their importance for the project's aim.

#### 3.1 Peer groups

Group work in social practices englobes a broader range of forms such as support and self-help groups, psychoeducational groups, and prevention groups (Gutiérrez et al., 2004). In its essence, the word "group" relates to a variety range of gatherings and forms of people while "work" suggests some intentional purpose

to it (Lindsay & Orton, 2014, p. 4). Peer support is defined by the fact that people who have similar experiences can better relate and can consequently offer more authentic empathy and validation to the other (Mead & MacNeil, 2006).

Funk and Drew Bold (2017) describe the several benefits of peer groups that corroborate the use of this method. The positive aspects of these groups can include the provision of a safe space that engages participants to share emotions, support, and learning new ideas and solutions from hearing of each other's similar experiences, strengthening of social support networks and sense of belongingness, and sharing of valuable information of community resources or practical support that can help participants' in facing certain challenges (Funk & Drew Bold, 2017).

In this project development thesis, a peer support group is, therefore, the central working method. In my understanding, this group setting is a credible (as explained before) grounding space for developing, with safety and engagement, the support for fathers in increasing emotional self-awareness and strengthening the relationship with their children by peer sharing. Moreover, I stress the relevant sense of belongingness, self-understanding, and equality that this activity can bring to participants (Mead & MacNeil, 2006).

### 3.2 Emotional Intelligence

According to Daniel Goleman (2020, p. 6), "Emotions are, in essence, impulses to act, the instant plans for handling life that evolution has instilled in us". Paul Ekman (2003) complements that emotions happen in every relationship we care about, and it determines the quality of our lives: "they may lead us to act in ways that we think are realistic and appropriate, but our emotions can also lead us to act in ways we regret terribly afterward" (Ekman, 2003, p. xvii). In considering those aspects, Goleman (2020) defined Emotional Intelligence as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships."

In its turn, emotional self-awareness is one of the aspects of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2020). Self-awareness or knowing one's emotions is vital for the development of emotional intelligence, as the ability to recognize feelings moment to moment leads individuals into self-understanding and psychological insights toward better decisions in life (Goleman, 2020, pp. 37-38).

To contribute to the discussion, Howe (2008, p. 20) claims that "emotionally competent individuals respond creatively when faced with tricky social situations", they are problem-solvers. Furthermore, "many aspects of our health and wellbeing require us to feel involved, recognized and connected with other people, particularly at the emotional level" (Howe, 2008, p. 114).

The enhancement of emotional self-awareness supports individuals in better understanding of their emotions, which also makes them more empathetic to others' feelings and needs (Rosenberg, 2015). This quality of emotional relation is at the core of parents' attachment to their children (Verschueren, 2020). That is why the increase of emotional self-awareness skills in fathers is the main aim of this thesis project development, which is likely to strengthen a father-children relationship.

As indicated, for those reasons above, I argue that the development of emotional intelligence skills, specifically the emotional self-awareness aspects, can bring relevant benefits to fathers' involvement in the upbringing of children meanwhile increasing their own sense of well-being.

### 3.3 Nonviolent Communication

During my research on how to develop efficient and tested tools for increasing emotional self-awareness in individuals' lives, I realized the brilliant framework of non-violent communication (Rosenberg, 2015). At its core, it is stated that one's emotions relate to unmet or met needs, and thus acknowledging them would raise about in one's awareness possibility to express those needs in a constructive emotional connection with the other (Rosenberg, 2015). At the beginning of 2022, I participated in a training course to develop my own skills in non-violent

communications for the purpose of acknowledging a valid and efficient tool to increase emotional self-awareness in work groups.

Nonviolent Communication is, therefore, an essential aspect in the project's implementation phase as it is an inspiring method for the development of human connection with an efficient approach to increasing individuals' emotional self-awareness. That is the reason why it is important to clarify its background in this part of the thesis.

This approach was developed by a social psychologist called Marshall Rosenberg (October 6, 1934 – February 7, 2015). His big aspirations are summarized in this statement:

With Nonviolent Communication (NVC) we learn to hear our own deeper needs and those of others. Through its emphasis on deep listening—to ourselves as well as others—NVC helps us discover the depth of our own compassion. This language reveals the awareness that all human beings are only trying to honor universal values and needs, every minute, every day. (The Center for Nonviolent Communication [CNVC], 2022)

According to Rosenberg (2015, 3), training in nonviolent communication can lead us to observe thoroughly the behaviors and conditions that are affecting us in any given context, without automatic reactions, which creates empathetic space to address feelings, needs, and what we objectively want from the moment. Simply, and yet powerful, this dynamic of observing and meaning objectively emotions and needs serves nicely to our thesis purpose, which aims to lead participants in the peer group to share thoughts towards more constructive discussions, weakening confrontation and rumination into past emotional distress experiences.

To conclude, I defend that through the practice of nonviolent communication, we can develop skills in observing situations factually, while recognizing which emotions are being felt, and which values drive us to request the satisfaction of our needs, which I argue is at the core of fathers-children emotional involvement.

#### 4 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

A summary of the project is: a peer group will be implemented in partnership with Familia ry aiming to support the well-being of fathers in intercultural families in developing a stronger emotional relationship with their children. The group sessions will bring important topics related to fatherhood and they will be facilitated with tools and reflective questions aiming to enhance emotional self-awareness through participants' listening and sharing of their reflections. It is expected the increase in participants' emotional vocabulary and emotional self-awareness skills, which leads to a new comprehension of how one can constructively act on emotions meanwhile connecting and empathizing with others. Furthermore, it also aims the increase individuals' sense of belonging, empowerment, and overall well-being.

The project will consider the planning, execution, and evaluation of a peer support group targeting fathers reached out by Familia's network. This organization has been implementing a father's peer group for at least since 2018. With that in mind, this new project was designed to add value to that expertise by offering and assessing a new approach to facilitating and guiding peers' discussions, which will be the emotional intelligence framework, more specifically on the development of emotional self-awareness skills using nonviolent communication tools. The group sessions' topics will be like the ones developed in former groups with new awareness and focus on emotions.

Furthermore, I argue that, overall, anyone can enhance his/her well-being and navigate strongly and wisely in times of challenges by acknowledging and embracing emotions. Research experts (Ekman, 2003; Goleman, 2020; McLaren, 2010) show that emotions lose strength in negative responses under individuals' self-awareness observance. Moreover, the ability to visualize better strategies that serve his/her well-being is also increased.

That is the context in which the idea of creating a peer support group for fathers with guided strategies to increase participants' emotional self-awareness took place. This new peer group project is conceived to increase participants' emotional vocabulary and emotional self-awareness while discussing topics related to fatherhood (the topics will be like the ones developed in previous groups with the new awareness and focus on emotions). It is expected that peers will understand common factors behind a group of emotions and how to constructively act on them. Furthermore, from the group's listening and sharing dynamics, it is expected empathy increase, empowerment, and overall well-being in fathers' life, besides strengthening their involvement with children.

For further justification on the importance of offering emotional support to fathers as well as other services regarding their mental health, they also can suffer from depression after childbirth like the mothers (National Institute for Children's Health Quality [NICHQ], 2023). Moreover, men trying to reconcile ideas of masculinity from cultural influences with the newer fathers' role expectations can be challenging and internally stressful, mainly when they are facing additional structural barriers such as economic challenges, unemployment, and/or living in different housing than their child. These factors can be a hindrance to their ability to connect with their children (NICHQ, 2023).

Among other needed services to support fathers' general well-being, I argue that especially assistance in the development of their emotional self-awareness skills can significantly strengthen the relationship with their child, meanwhile promoting their overall well-being. Furthermore, it can directly support the well-being of children, mothers, and families, as fathers' involvement supports the balance and equality between parents' responsibilities.

I explained in the previous paragraphs the purpose and general aims of this development-orientated thesis. Nonetheless, I argue it is still relevant to define one clear goal and specific objectives for supporting projects' implementation. For that reason, I will describe in the following paragraphs the project's objectives while tempting to frame them in the SMART tool (Ogbeiwi, 2017).



A goal can be defined as “the higher-order objective to which a development intervention is intended to contribute” (Organisation for Economic, Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2022). For this project, I established the main goal as: “to strengthen the emotional relationship between fathers and their children”.

For the reasons already justified in the thesis’ context background and methods, the development of emotional self-awareness in the target group can lead to achieving that goal. Moreover, I created specific objectives aiming at the increase of emotional awareness in fathers. For project management purposes, it was relevant to set objectives as clearly as possible. In the box below, I show the objectives as SMART statements as it gives a clear direction for action planning and implementation (Ogbeiwi, 2017).

**Goal:**

To strengthen the emotional relationship between fathers and their children.

**Objectives:**

- a) To increase emotional support for fathers in intercultural families in Finland, by offering, in partnership with Familia ry, 7 x 1,5 hours peer support group sessions, with 3 to 10 participants, from the 11th of April 2022 until the 30th of May 2022.

**Specific:** partnership is established through agreement, the number of sessions and period is specific, the target group is defined, and the number of participants is accordingly to human resource and material support.

**Measurable:** the working plan is established in partnership with Familia with enough time, each session will be spent 1.5 hours of group work, and planning of group sessions will be 5 hours of preparation per session.

**Achievable:** Partner will provide technical support and space for the group sessions (hybrid session online/face to face is expected) and 150 euros for the activities are granted.

**Relevant:** The objective is aligned with the stated goal; moreover, it is aligned with our partner organization's scope.

**Time-bound:** preparations will start a month before the sessions and group work is bound from the 11th of April 2022 until the 30th of May 2022.

- b) To increase participants' emotional self-awareness meanwhile introducing the basics of nonviolent communication framework within the session's theme, with the use of two working tools (list of emotions and list of needs).

**Specific:** introduction of the basics of nonviolent communication through existent resources, use of 2 tools (list of emotions and list of needs) provided by the Center of Nonviolent Communication.

**Measurable:** each session is planned space for participants' final sharing bounded by the question "what is your takeaway of today's session sharing", it is furthermore planned one final session with one research group dynamic activity to evaluate this objective.

**Achievable:** nonviolent communication has been supporting emotional self-awareness in individuals since the 1960s.

**Relevant:** This objective is aligned with the goals.

**Time-bound:** it is bound by the time of 1,5 hours of each session.

## 5 WORKING LIFE PARTNER

According to OECD (2022), a partner is "an individual or organization that collaborates on an intervention to achieve mutually agreed objectives". In that sense, "the concept of partnership connotes shared goals, common responsibility for outcomes, distinct accountabilities and reciprocal obligations" (OECD, 2022). Partners may include communities, governments (national regional, local), civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, universities, professional and business associations, private entities, and multi-lateral organizations involved in funding, implementing, or overseeing the intervention (OECD, 2002).

For this project, the working life partner is an organization called Familia ry. The acronym ry is the abbreviation for rekisteröity yhdistys (Finnish for registered association), Familia is, therefore, a registered non-profit organization set in Finland. Importantly to emphasize, they were founded 35 years ago and due to their

longevous and extensive work in the social field became the leading expert and advocate of intercultural families in the country.

Familia promotes the well-being of intercultural families by offering peer support and volunteer activities, information, advice, and Finnish courses. The organization has also the scope of making improvements in the social and legal systems so that the needs of intercultural and multilingual families and Finns would be better met in Finland. They have been on my networking list for some time. Back in 2016, Familia offered services that were important to support my well-being while facing the challenges of moving to this new country, so in that sense, I was aware of their services and their support network before the starting of the project.

The work-life partner has resources and previous expertise in starting peer groups with fathers. This expertise will be considered while designing the new project. As an example, the timing and topics of the meetings will be chosen after the research on the documentation of preceding groups. Moreover, the partner organization has communication channels (Website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), that reach more than 6.000 people, thus the possible participants will be reached from there.

In supporting this project, it was agreed with the working life partner organization's role so that would be provided necessary support and resources for the implementation of the peer group. For instance, the group room in Familias' premises (Lintulahdenkatu 10, 7th Floor, 00500 Helsinki) was reserved for face-to-face meetings for the time being of the activities. Expertise and co-planning meetings happened with the support of their Executive Director, Elina Helmanen, and their Volunteer Coordinator, Nora Dadi. Human Resources was offered with the support of interns. Technical and financial support was made available. A final evaluation meeting was planned with the Executive Director and Volunteer Coordinator.

Finally, it is important to recognize and let it be registered here the great support of this working life partner. They have been an essential and active part of this project. I felt supported and understood throughout all phases of implementing

the peer group and I argue that support had positively affected peers' satisfaction with the group.

## 6 TARGET GROUP AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

OECD (2022) defines a target group as the specific individuals, communities, or organizations that the intervention is intended to reach. In that sense, fathers in Finland would be the target group and the main beneficiaries of the project's efforts. Important to note that, due to the projects' partnership with Familia ry, the target group population was restricted to fathers of intercultural families reached by organizations' networking. The nationality of the fathers was not considered, it means someone could be Finnish and also a father of intercultural family, and therefore part of our target group. I could not find statistics correlating the number of fathers in intercultural families. Nevertheless, we can estimate how many families could be indirectly impacted by the project's aim. There are nearly 83.000 intercultural couples and families living in Finland in cohabitation or marriage, where one of the spouses was born in Finland and the other abroad (Familia, 2022).

Keith and Applegarth (2019) states that stakeholders are those people or organizations who may be affected in some way by the project you are undertaking. Similarly, OECD (2022) define stakeholders as "agencies, organizations, groups, or individuals who have a direct or indirect interest in the intervention or its monitoring and evaluation". In the social and healthcare field, it includes the service users, carers, staff, and other organizations including public service (Spolander & Martin, 2012). Furthermore, according to Lock (2013), stakeholders can be identified and classified as primary and secondary according to their level of affecting or being affected by the project.

The main stakeholders from this project are Familia ry and the fathers of intercultural families reached by the organizations' network. Familia is directly involved in the planning and implementation of the peer group and therefore can impact the outcome of the project. It is also impacted by the project as they will add to their expertise the experience of offering an innovative peer group activity with the development of emotional intelligence in participants, which has not been done before.

Fathers of intercultural families are the service users; thus, they are the primary stakeholders and target group of the project's aims, as it was mentioned before. Even though children and mothers can be directly affected by the success of this project, they are not the service users; thus, I define them as secondary stakeholders.

Miessakit ry is a non-governmental expert organization established to support the mental, psychological, and social growth of men. I define them as secondary stakeholders as this project's aim to support the emotional well-being of men. They promptly agreed to help us with the advertisement of the group through their social network.

Suomen Pakolaisapu ry (Finnish Refugee Council) is Finland's largest expert organization specialized in the issues of forced displacement and migration. They offer training for peer facilitators and impacts in the integration of immigrants in Finland. I participated in one of their training courses to acquire skills to facilitate the group, it was therefore an important network for implementing this peer group. Moreover, as the target group is fathers of intercultural families, they are secondary stakeholders as possible migrants' parents can be reached by our project.

Finally, Terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus [THL] (Finnish name for Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare) is an independent state-owned expert and research institute that promotes the welfare, health, and safety of the population, another stakeholder of this project. One of their main goals is to prevent social problems and develop welfare, and thus they promoted the Finnish family leave reform (THL, 2022). They are not directly involved in the implementation of our peer group,

nonetheless they are important stakeholders as the success of our project support directly gender equality and balance in family roles, one of the main goals of the family leave reform (THL, 2022).

## 7 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The project considered the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a peer support group. The planning phase took place a month before the start of the activities and it consisted of meetings with the partner's Executive Director, Elina Helmanen, and their Volunteer Coordinator, Nora Dadi, to discuss resources, aims, and objectives of the project. The planning also considered my training as a peer supporter facilitator and in nonviolent communication. Those training supported me in developing skills and tools to facilitate group activities. The way of facilitating the sessions and how tools were implemented will be discussed in this Chapter, in the sub-chapter sessions' implementation. Later, I will discuss the evaluation phase. For this chapter, you will see first an overview of the project's plan design. Second, the plan and report of reaching out to the participants. Third, I will present a survey implemented to assess participants' needs. For last, I will explain the plan for group activities and how sessions were implemented.

### 7.1 An overview of project plan

#### **PEER SUPPORT GROUP PLAN**

- 1. Name of the group:** Duo fathers' group: supporting a wise fatherhood
- 2. Beneficiaries:** English speaker fathers in intercultural families in Finland, children, and partners.
- 3. Form of the group:** a) Peer support group; b) Peer group; c) Activity peer group; (all of them).  
What do the participants need the most? a) guided discussions, b) open discussions, c) a group to belong to, and d) activities. (All of them are considered)

**4. Entering the group:** this is a closing group, which means that participants are chosen before the start and new ones are welcomed just during the first 2 meetings

**5. Participants are interviewed beforehand:** Yes. The idea is that the peer supporters and participants get to know each other and the starting of the group becomes easier.

**6. Objectives for the group season:**

- a) The participant will be able to reflect with peers on important themes related to fatherhood while developing emotional self-awareness and nonviolent communication skills.
- b) The participant will be able to improve their own well-beingness and connection with children while adding emotional awareness to past situations related to fatherhood and while discussing in group constructive ways to use emotions.
- c) The participant will be able to build a social network and engage in activities with their peers.
- d) The participants will be able to understand how to build strategies to strengthen their emotional connection with children and partners.

**7. Desired number of participants:** 3-10

**8. Language:** English

**9. Name(s) of the peer supporter(s):** Rafael Vieites Borges

**10. Meeting place:** Familia's premises at Lintulahdenkatu 10, 7th Floor, 00500 Helsinki

**11. Day of the week and time:** Mondays, 5:30 pm – 7 pm

**12. The first meeting and frequency:** The 1st meeting will be held on Monday, the 11th of April 2022, and it will continue once a week until the 30th of May 2022.

**13. Responsible employee and their contact info:** Nora Dadi - 050 502 1039 - nora.dadi (at) familialy.fi

## Program

**1st meeting – themes:** Welcoming (establishing group's connection) / Introduction / Grounding rules / Expectations / Checking Themes / Suggestion of new Themes and Activities

**Objectives:** To present the themes and hear the participants' expectations. To establish ground rules (group safety). To increase awareness of building a safe space for sharing. The participants will be able to introduce themselves and express some general feelings about their situation and their needs.

**Activities/Tools:** use of photography, Kahoot, emotional intelligence quiz.

**2nd meeting - theme:** the news about becoming a father; preparing to become a family: the pregnancy; the birth of the child and the day-to-day life after the birth.

**Objectives:** To increase understanding of how fatherhood transforms man

**Activities/Tools:** list of feelings and list of needs (CNVC).

**3rd meeting - theme:** how fatherhood affects/changes many aspects of men's life.

**Objectives:** To check an individual's feelings and possible unmet needs in different areas of an individual's life.

**Activities/Tools:** blob tree image, wheel of life template, list of emotions, and list of human needs.

**4th meeting - theme:** after the baby, the life with the partner – how the quality of the relationship with the partner affects men's life.

**Objectives:** To increase understanding about individuals' needs within an intimate relationship dynamic, to understand how emotions are generated in this dynamic, and to increase empathy towards partners' feelings and needs.

**Activities/Tools:** the testimony of conflict situations and unmet needs collected from women; list of feelings and list of needs.

**5th meeting - themes:** strengthening the emotional connection with the children – how to use the reflections and understanding developed so far to integrate into fatherhood day-to-day life.

**Objectives:** To understand how recognizing emotions and needs can develop empathy and connection with children. To understand how nonviolent communication can enhance relationships with kids.

**Activities/Tools:** each participant will share one testimony of a challenging situation with their kids and reflect on their, and children, emotions, and unmet needs; a list of feelings and a list of needs.

**6th meeting - theme:** free discussion

**Objectives:** To empower participants in supporting their personal sharing on what is more important for them at the moment. To support participants with peer reflection and feedback.

**Activities/Tools:** no programmed tools.

**7th meeting - themes:** wrapping up day and celebration of the sharing process: research focus discussion session with a third person and celebrative dinner.

**Objectives:** to acknowledge participants' evaluation of their group process; to assess if the group's aims and objectives were met; to provide fun and celebrative time.

**Activities/Tools:** focus group and sushi dinner afterward.

## 7.2 Reaching out to participants

The strategy to publicize the group was developed with the support of the partner organization. The group was announced on Familia's webpage, besides their



Facebook and Instagram accounts. Moreover, their WhatsApp group of former participants was also used. I also requested Miessakit ry (stakeholder) to promote the event through their communication channels, and they promptly accepted it. Another stakeholder association, the Refugee Council, also shared it on their Facebook account. Last, a popular Facebook community for international fathers in Finland was used to advertise the group. I assess, overall, that the strategy was successfully implemented and, as a result, the group started with 11 enrolments, and 7 participants attending the first meeting, which compared to the last group's report, it represents a significant increase in presence.

### 7.3 Participants' enrolment

The number of participants varied during the 2 months period in which the group was implemented. The group had the number of 11 enrolments, 2 never showed up, 2 participants were present in one or 2 sessions, 1 participant was present in 3 or 4 sessions, and 5 participants in 5 or 6 sessions, 1 participant in all 7 sessions. I assess these numbers as a significant increase in commitment and engagement when compared to the constancy of individuals' presence reported by the previous group leader in Familia. I argue that the fact that the group had planned content and structured meetings (with tools regarding the progressive development of participants' emotional self-awareness) supported the commitment throughout the 7 sessions.

### 7.4 Interviewing participants

One first action aiming to know better participants was an interview of participants through a short phone call a couple of days before the start of the group. It was the space for my subjective first assessment of participants' engagement, expectations, and needs. Through the phone call, I aimed to introduce myself, and the concept idea behind the group and collect their first impressions on the subject. My goal was to welcome the participants individually while developing safety, relatedness, and empathy. In the same phone call, I requested them to fill out a

formal evaluation form regarding their needs and expectations (see Appendix A). I used the Microsoft Form platform available through the partnership with Familia ry. These were the questions:

1. In your everyday life, how comfortable are you when you need to express your feelings verbally and non-verbally (1= not comfortable at all, 5= neutral, 10= very comfortable) \*
2. Are you aware of how recognizing emotions can relate to self-development and well-being?
3. How motivated do you feel about attending activities focusing on fatherhood and expressing emotions? \*
4. If a friend asked you today to explain to him/her the general benefits of expressing emotions, how confident would you be?
5. When you feel angry at someone, how likely would you handle the situation constructively? (E.g., by verbalizing your feelings, request your needs, handle a confrontation, take a break, initiate a conversation or use "I" terms instead of "you" during a heated situation)
6. What do you think, how likely the use of empathetic communication skills and emotional self-awareness would strengthen the relationship between you and your child?
7. Please describe with 3 words what fatherhood means to you:

In the same form, I requested data collection consent with the following clarification:

This survey aims to collect information from your participation in the fathers' peer group. It will support the peer facilitator, Rafael Borges, in understanding how the group's objectives can be better met. The data will be anonymously used in the final evaluation of this group project, which is part of the study thesis of Rafael Borges in collaboration with Kamilla Fodor. This evaluation will support Familia in further developing the father's peer group. While answering this form, you consent to the use of data in the way it was explained. Any doubt, please reach out to Rafael for clarifications.

I argue that the phone call initial introduction and assessment strategy created a satisfactory engagement in participants filling out the form. I collected 7

responses, which represented all participants by that point (later, more participants entered the group). Check the answers in Appendix.

The first evaluation assessment through the phone and form supported me to create better strategies for planning and conducting the following group sessions in more alignment with participants' expectations (check results in Appendix A). The tools to be applied during the group sessions (to enhance the development of emotional self-awareness) were practiced and validated before through my experience in training and workshops and were chosen considering the groups' aims and participants' expectations.

### 7.5 Plan of group activities

The main claim of this thesis project is to develop emotional self-awareness in group participants meanwhile discussing the same themes that have been proposed before in the Familia fathers' group. Important to clarify that the organization's previous peer groups did not have the clear objective of establishing and facilitating a peer process that requires participants to develop emotional self-awareness. Therefore, although we planned to continue the peer group with some elements of the former ones at Familia, these fathers' meetings are completely new in their further aims.

Meetings were initially programmed to happen face-to-face in Familia's premises, once a week, from the 11th of April until the 30th of May 2022, in a total of 7 sessions. Each session was planned to address one topic related to fatherhood, which was inspired by preceding groups. These were the first planned themes: a) welcoming (establishing the group's connection) / Introduction / Grounding rules / Expectations / Checking Themes / Suggestion of new Themes and Activities, b) the news about becoming a father; preparing to become a family: the pregnancy; the birth of the child and the day-to-day life after the birth; c) how fatherhood affects/changes many aspects of men's life; d) after the baby, the life with the partner – how the quality of the relationship with the partner affects men's life; e) strengthening the emotional connection with the children – how to use the

reflections and understanding developed so far to integrate into fatherhood day-to-day life; f) free discussion day; and g) wrapping up day and celebration of the sharing process: research focus discussion session with a third person and celebrative dinner.

During the thematic peer discussions, it was planned to give participants a list of emotions and a list of some relevant human needs. It was also defined that after the peer supporter facilitator proposed open-ended questions regarding the subject of the day, it would be requested that participants identify the main emotions felt and describe their feelings. The second step would be to guide the group reflection on how these certain emotions relate to certain human needs, which could vary from participant to participant. It was expected in this process the increase emotional self-awareness skills meanwhile addressing consciously participants' actual needs. After the comprehension of this process, the peer facilitator would support each participant in creating strategies to increase the satisfaction of their needs. It was also expected from the sharing and active listening that other peers would gain knowledge from each other to use in their day-to-day life, consequently increasing their well-being. This process was inspired by the knowledge condensed in the nonviolent communication framework (Rosenberg, 2015).

Alongside understanding and becoming more emotionally self-aware, the development of empathetic communication skills (another name for the nonviolent communication competencies) was a crucial element for giving meaning and closing the thematic discussions within the peer support group, as the work plan indicated. The reason for that is that nonviolent communication facilitates the path to recognize that emotions are related to individuals' needs while it points to an efficient and empathetic way to acknowledge and communicate your needs to others, which can increase chances to get the support you aim for.

## 7.6 Evaluation plan

Keith and Applegarth (2019) emphasize that the act of reviewing a project plan begins during the implementation phase. At the end of the project, it is also expected that we want to look at the lessons to be learned from how it was carried out, and to see if its completion has had the desired effect (Keith & Applegarth, 2019). This evaluation description was considered in this development-orientated thesis. I will explain in the next paragraphs how the evaluation was planned to be carried out while the lessons learned from this process will be described in subchapter 7.7 and the final chapter, Discussion and Conclusions.

It was innovative the concept idea of implementing a peer support group while developing emotional self-awareness skills in the participants. Nevertheless, the excitement of developing something new contrasted with the uncertain feelings I had about the efficiency of this idea. For that reason, I created a thoughtful plan to evaluate the project from the beginning to the end.

In the evaluation of the group, it was planned to be used the following methods: a) Interviews before and/or after the group season; b) a survey before and after the group season; c) participants' feedback for each session; d) a recorded reflective observation diary; and e) research focus group discussion.

The first interview and first-form survey (see Appendix A) had the aim to understand more specifically the participant's needs. It contained questions related to the peer group's objectives and how they could respond to specific participants' expectations and needs.

Another evaluation step implemented was the assessment of each group session in its closure part. As I way of wrapping up participants' feelings and meanings in the work group session, I audio recorded with their consent the last 10 minutes of each session, which corresponded to its final part as I said. Each participant was given a couple of minutes to answer what was their takeaway from the peer session and what were their feelings and emotions in that moment. This evaluation phase turned out to be an important assessment part of the project for me because I used it as feedback for change implementation during the project. The

fact that was given space for them to be heard with the implementing safety, to be honest, and critical about each group strategy to engage peers in sharing.

Finally, it was planned that the last group session would be a celebrative closure activity with a small group session to collect participants' feedback in the form of a research focus group method. It was reserved for about an hour to develop the research activity and another hour for a dinner with only the participants.

The last part of the evaluation was planned to proceed in collaboration with the student's classmate Kamilla Fodor, who was doing a research thesis process in the context of this peer support project. She developed her thesis on qualitative research based on the achievement of the group's aim. I was not part of this evaluation phase; thus, this represented an external evaluation, which means the evaluation of an intervention conducted by individuals outside of its implementation (OECD, 2022).

As also part of her data collection, it was planned that she would interview me to collect the peer facilitator's impression of each session. In answering her questions as honestly as I could, it gave me space to self-reflect on my own feelings during each session, which supported me to better prepare for the following sessions.

### 7.7 Implementation results, feedback, and specific recommendations

**First session** – Initially, there was an introduction to the group aims and the peer leader. Second, it was explained some ground rules to keep the group as a safe environment as possible. Third, the participants were requested to introduce themselves by presenting a photo of their fathers and their child/children. It was also requested to share it in the context of what are the most common emotions their father brings to them (this was the used question: does the connection with your father brings more pleasant or unpleasant emotions overall?). Then we had a playful time with Kahoot answering the quiz "emotionally intelligent" I prepared with the content of the University of California Berkley's Greater Good Science

Center (they were shown different person's faces to guess which emotion they were feeling). Finally, we had sessions' wrapping up time with the question "how are you feeling now with this session?"; and what is your "main takeaway of this session?".

Report of first meeting: it was implemented in a hybrid space (online and face-to-face participants) with the presence of 5 participants virtually and 3 locally in Familia's premises. It was the first time I and Familia were using this method for a peer support group. Therefore, we needed to learn how to implement and develop it meanwhile having the first practice with the first experience. I assess that it was implemented as well as possible. There were some technical issues to be addressed. I learned the importance of having a bigger screen and sound system adjusted behind the screen so that participants in the face-to-face could enhance focus and connection with the online ones (the screen and sound system were adjusted in the following meeting). I evaluate that the hybrid style is a new space environment that will be used more and more these days, as it brings many possibilities to enhance the number of participants while increasing their comfortability and shortening meeting space distances. Nonetheless, I argue that, although peer groups can be implemented in this way, face-to-face spaces should be the aim as the quality of human connection, empathy, and focus between participants increase significantly in environments they are physically presents. This was an intense session due to so many planned activities. The photography method was demonstrated to be an effective way to engage participants, so I highly recommend it. The introduction of how important the development of emotional self-awareness is in order to develop better human connection was well assimilated. During the session's closing time, I assess that the participants had positive feelings overall: they related to having good expectations with the groups' development; they were hoping for learning more with each other in the next meetings and having some fun; some participants reported for having hope for getting strength with the group and developing a better relationship with their family. Another one enjoyed the exchanging and learning from the sharing. Greetings for the diverse group were related as well. They perceived it as a fun day despite the intensity of the activities. We had afterwards a relaxing dinner with pizzas. One recommendation is that the activities planned could be spread into two sessions,

giving more relaxing space for the participants to connect with themselves in their narratives; it was an overall very intense day with each person's sharing and hearing bounded by the activities and structure, therefore, if in one hand the activities were efficient to create high engagement in participants, on the other hand, there was no space for exchanging in a spontaneous way, which was feedback given by participants.

**Second meeting** – First, it was given a short introduction to the main emotions and their triggers. It was explained how emotional self-awareness can help you to develop well-being and fatherhood involvement. Secondly, it was presented to them a list of emotions and needs, and how they relate to each other. Then, it was requested that participants would remember the place they were when getting the news about becoming a father; they were asked to use the given lists to support them retrospectively in identifying the emotions and met needs at that moment. We had an attendance of 7 participants + peer leader = 8 (4 face-to-face and 4 online).

In that session, I initially was physically very tired due to previous extra working meetings on the same day. The fact that the session was planned and that there was activity to engage participants helped me in getting strengthened to well lead the group despite the tiredness. Nonetheless, I recommend for future peer supporters leaders that on the day of the sessions, you keep space in your schedule to rest and save energy for the group leading, which will possibly enhance your presence.

Reporting on the session, the participants were highly engaged on this day. In the session's wrapping up, some participants complained about the time being too short despite it being developed for 1,5 hours continuously. I assess that requesting for participants' remembering an important moment as it is the day in which they became aware first time of the pregnancy, with following sharing on the main emotions and human needs present in that situation (lists were used to support), created an intense and positive emotional atmosphere that kept their engagement throughout the whole session. We were 8 participants, and it was set similar time for each one's sharing, and they were so excited that requesting



more session time took place again. One recommendation for future project development is to consider that activities expected to bring high emotional engagement could be developed in smaller peer groups or in a workshop space environment in which the expectation of freedom to engage in others' narratives is less expected. They reported in the session's closing that the framework created high relatedness in participants, but the session's timing was too rigid. They also reported some double feelings: being a bit annoyed about the structure, but grateful for the experience as it pushed them out of their comfort zone, as one said he could have talked for hours. Some expressed feelings of belongingness to the group. Some reported wishing to engage in more random talks that possibly appear. Some described re-evaluating their experiences through the discussion (positive feelings about the possibility of self-reflection). Some expressed positive feelings about the structure as it kept their focus together in the discussions. Others reported positive feelings about the usefulness of the worked tool, of understanding how emotions and needs are related meanwhile being able to self-reflect on their nowadays experiences. There was excitement about realizing that emotions are related to needs, which proved that the use of nonviolent communication tools is efficient. Some report on the possibilities to develop their relationship with their partner and appreciation of the perspective of the used approach. Some recommendations to improve:

Some insights on the happenings within this session to be improved in future groups: the number of participants should be shorter if the tools meant to trigger deeper emotional talks; the increase of warming up time in beginning sessions to smooth connection among participants (suggestion for short meditation in the beginning to enhance connection with oneself and others). The technical part of the hybrid space was better implemented (new screen and new sound system from the back of the screen), on the other hand, I suggest that future peer groups consider that this space has advantages but also brings challenges to human connection in space that cannot be overcome by the nature of the virtual environments.

**Third meeting** – we went through some guided questions aiming to support participants in filling a tool called the “wheel of life” (evaluation of 8 areas of one's

life, see appendix). Each participant could introduce shortly to other participants his wheel of life and connect it with some emotions and needs related to those aspects. In this session, we had 7 participants (6 + the leader), 5 online and 2 face-to-face. The fact that it was the first time we had 1 participant and the peer leader present face-to-face meanwhile 5 were online, I felt there was a significant change in the group connection dynamic. I argue that because most of them were online, we all needed to focus more on the screen than on the physical space we were in Familia premises. I understood that face-to-face groups' dynamic offered me more grounding and presence to engage in supporting the group. Nonetheless, satisfactorily, the level of commitment and bond among participants was established. One month after the first meeting there were a few drops out.

About the used activities, following a suggestion of the previous group's feedback, I planned a better time for settling the group's connection; I used a tool called "blob tree" (see appendix) so that participants could feel more welcoming in sharing how they were doing with tool's support (these were the used questions: how are you doing after the Vapu? Can you recognize yourself in one more character of the blob tree). I observed that satisfactorily supported participants' warming up for engaging in the group's discussion next. Then, we started filling the tool "wheel of life". After they finished, they were asked to present their image answering, "what are your main emotions in seeing the overall of your life in perspective with the image of your wheel of life?", "in any specific area would you like to comment?". It generated engagement, they were willing to talk a lot, and I needed to slightly interfere to assure all participants would have a proportional time of sharing. I observed that participants felt annoyed that the time was felt short again, despite the session having happened in 1,5 hours, they want to talk more. Some positive reports were also observed: they expressed recognizing themselves in other narratives. In this meeting, we had first discussions about the possibility of being more flexible with the group's sharing structure and free talks. Something relevant I observed this day, I felt there was more bonding created among participants, as they were feeling very comfortable and happy in sharing with each other.

These were some of the participants' feedback highlights at the end of the session: some expressed empathy for other stories; one reported feeling supported for belonging to the group; another one assessed the relevance in reflecting about themselves in the wheel of life perspective; another participant expressed that it is a key fact in understanding emotions, observing what personal needs to be improved; other enjoyed the sharing and hearing of other stories, as he felt supported by other in listening, having insights, as it generates good feelings, positive experience for him; another one report the realization that despite they have different experiences still they can recognize themselves in each other narratives.

**Fourth meeting** – the theme was the relationship with intimate partners – the objective was to understand how emotional self-awareness skills (recognition of emotion and needs) apply within the context of intimate relationships. Initially, each participant could shortly comment on the assumption that the “quality of their intimate relationship has a straight connection with their level of happiness and overall wellbeing”. Later, I presented then 6 to 7 examples of real situations in which a female (in relation to their partner) reported to me emotions and needs felt in a triggering situation with their partner. Before giving their actual answers to the group, participants were requested, after listening to the situation context, to give their best guessing through the list of emotions and needs, what the women were feeling and needing in that situation. I observed that their guessing was mostly aligned with the actual answer, which I concluded as a significant sign that our work on developing emotional self-awareness skills had been fruitful.

About leading the group this session, I felt it was a more challenging day considering I was, first time, alone in Familia's premises, while 4 participants were online. I created the expectation that this would be the best working group day, as the relationship theme always brings lots of engagement in sharing, throughout my experience in groups, therefore I was hoping that the participants would be mostly present in the face-to-face to increase the quality of connection.

About running the activities, the list of needs and the list of emotions were used. They were quite good at guessing the women's emotions and needs. I argue that they reached some satisfactory level of understanding and integration on the self-

awareness exercises previously done. At the end of the session, observing they were requesting again more freedom in engaging through the sharing, we agreed that we would have just one last meeting with the structure to attend to the aims of the groups, and then we would have the following up meeting without structure in the sharing.

Some of the participants' feedback highlights at the end of the session: one reported that seeking needs behind emotions is a good tool to integrate into daily life (realization); another realized being slightly confused about his expectations of the group being chit-chat dynamic but realizing on the other hand that the learning purpose and structure, it is significantly useful for him; another one expressed realizing that he can communicate better to people with the recognition of needs and feelings; one acknowledged that the online environment "makes things less connected"; some expressed that the examples brought helped to visualize what is driving emotions, which hopefully will support the progress in their relationship.

**Fifth meeting** – the theme was about the connection with our children and how emotional self-awareness and recognition of emotions and needs could support its strengthening. The objective was to understand how we could summarize and integrate the knowledge we have built so far within the communication with our kids, which is the scope of our fatherhood. I presented a couple of examples of my own relationship with my son in which I had recognized my son's needs and emotions and still, I could put boundaries in a more empathetic way (less reactive while observing mine and my son's needs altogether). Later, it was requested that each participant could recall a situation with their own child and how the new understanding could be applied retrospectively.

We were 5 participants (4 plus the leader) face-to-face and 2 online. I felt I had much more grounding feelings because of the high number of participants present locally. This was one of the most important group work days as we were developing emotional self-awareness skills in direct connection with our children (to be able to identify our own and our children's emotions and needs). The session's topic was how can we use all this knowledge we built so far to support our

fatherhood in emotionally engaging with our kids. Moreover, it was sent to them, a couple of days before the meeting, a report booklet from Australia (reference) advocating the importance of fathers in children's life (aiming to warm up for the sharing). During the session, through each other real examples, we could check the practicality of applying nonviolent communication tools in parenting. The overall feedbacks were positive and constructive, nonetheless, there were some complaints about the time and structure of sharing, and unnecessary interventions while leading. These were some participants' highlights feedback at the end of the session: one realized that there he feels more distance from acting on triggering situation, reporting when he feels angry he thinks first about what I need; another related that sharing their experiences always feels supportive, therefore he had an appreciation of each other sharing; other participant reported that the sharing was been relaxing, comfortable, feeling of empowering around the possibility of feeling safe and relaxed meanwhile; one reported that "speaking out" has been helping him a lot; one reported to expect less interference from the facilitator, suggesting more questions than providing answers; some expressed the acknowledgment that tools presented during discussions have been useful in his learning process. Last, one said that hearing from the sharing created self-awareness about how he is dealing with his kids, recognizing he needs to work more on his emotional intelligence.

**Sixth meeting** – it was a free talking day. There was no specific structure and the discussion started from the needs of the group on that day.

**Seventh meeting** – we had the research focus group led by Kamilla Fodor and celebration time afterward with a sushi dinner on Familia's premises.

## 8 RISK MANAGEMENT

A small risk management plan was developed and implemented during this development project. For instance, to minimize technical risks, the computer, and other hardware accessories were separated and tested a week before the start of the group.

Moreover, although the peer group was first designed to happen face-to-face, a hybrid format for the session meetings was designed to attend to the new needs of the Covid situation at the time. Participants that possibly could be sick by the time of the session could attend remotely the meeting. For clarification, the group happened when the Covid precautions were being still released and some health measurements were still being considered.

For maximizing the reaching out to participants, and minimizing the risks of not having enough enrolments, firstly it was requested that stakeholder organizations (for example Miessakit ry and Finnish Refugee Council) would announce the group in their digital networking. Inside Familia, we planned a small publicizing plan to reduce risks: it was planned three announcements in Familia's digital networking, one 3 weeks before the starting of the group, one a week before, and a third announcement in the week after the first session. Furthermore, it was planned that new participants would be accepted up to the start of the second meeting. And attendance will be flexible.

To minimize risks that participants would not feel engaged through group sharing, 10 to 15 minutes were reserved at the end part of each meeting for group reflection and feedback. From the beginning, despite there being a plan of themes and tools to lead sessions, participants were informed that their needs would guide us to adjustments and changes for the following meetings.

## 9 RESOURCES

Regarding budget planning, this development project, in normal conditions, would take into consideration costs in mainly three categories: human resources, material resources, and research expenses.

As human resources, it would be needed to hire a peer supporter leader, at least 3 hours per session (1,5h environmental preparation and 1,5h for session facilitation), for a total of 21 hours. As material resources, computer and tech structure for hybrid meetings will be needed (camera, microphone, netbook, sound system, high-speed internet). Moreover, coffee, tea, and cookies for about 8 participants were planned. For research expenses, 20 hours were predicted for training in tools in engaging participants.

As it was informed, the project thesis was agreed to be developed in partnership with Familia ry, a fact that reduced costs and implemented the peer group possible with little budget. This organization had resources availability for material and activities costs. For the rest, I have prepared myself to facilitate the group and to attend training for learning the tools. Familia had working staff to assist with preparing the environment and publicizing the group. Lastly, for group activities in extra time, it was planned two dinners for 8 participants. Familia ry offered a total of 150 euros for being used in those dinner activities.

## 10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

There are two main ethical implications to be evaluated in this thesis development project. The first is related to the nature of the discussions that will be focusing on addressing emotions. The second is regarding the intercultural context of the peers.

Discussions focusing on emotions can trigger feelings or memories that are not so pleasant for participants. To minimize this risk factor, a welcoming and individual interview will be held before the start of the group with each participant. The intention is to explain the group dynamic focusing on emotions and the reasons for that. It will be emphasized also the group support, confidentiality, and safety norms within the group agreement. Furthermore, Familia has individual counseling available, and if it is needed the participants will have access to it and all network to support them in the path of finding help.

Interculturalism, in its turn, brings about the possibility of diversity in values and perspectives of fatherhood among the participants. Even though it will be a peer support group, which means in essence they share similar life situations, it doesn't apply that there will be an agreement on sensitive fatherhood values, which can lead to misunderstanding and confrontation. Addressing this risk factor will be reinforced in the group agreement while it will acknowledge the intercultural nature of the group and the importance of non-discriminatory practices. Another action is regarding the discussion and sharing grounding rules: it will be explained that comments addressed to other participants' narratives will be just permitted regarding clarification of facts or to address common feelings and understanding.

## 11 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

With this development-orientated thesis, I expected that fathers would develop their emotional vocabulary and emotional self-awareness skills, which could lead them to a new comprehension of how they can constructively act on emotions meanwhile connecting and empathizing with their kids. I argue that the main goal was achieved through participants' feedback (vide subchapter 7.7). I also defend that the group meetings increased fathers' sense of belonging, empowerment, and overall well-being.



Moreover, the concept idea behind the project, which was the development of emotional intelligence in the target group, demonstrated to be meaningful and useful from both work-life partner and fathers' perspectives, also for myself. For instance, the partner organization actively welcomed and supported the project's implementation and embraced its further development, suggesting the continuation of the peer group. In its turn, fathers continuously reported furthering their learning process and their emotional understanding meanwhile having the sessions.

The tools meant to increase emotional self-awareness in participants were perceived as efficient. Participants validated its usefulness through sessions' reflective feedback. The group meeting's themes were also engaging and related to fathers' life and needs. Peers reported comprehension in integrating emotional self-awareness into their daily family life dynamic, which was one of the main goals of the project development.

There were also relevant constructive criticisms to be used in the project's further development. For example, the sessions were about 1 and 1/2 hours lasting, this period was perceived as short in participants' feedback. The reason in my understanding is that the used tools for enhancing emotional self-awareness in participants created high engagement in personal sharing, which went, on the one hand, very deep for each participant, on the other hand, time was limited, and talks were bounded by it. In this regard, my conclusion is that time was not the actual problem, but the strategy for developing participants' emotional skills in a peer group context, which has its limitation.

Even though the participants recognized and validated feelings of support, belongingness, friendship, and common understanding through the peer's sharing, the educational part of the group was perceived to be overweight compared to their expectation in engaging in the discussions. In despite of that, participants' engagement and commitment through the process were perceived as high when compared to the report of the previous fathers' group leader. I argue that one of the reasons is that the educational process and structure bounding the group's

facilitation created a continuous flow space for improving and deepening participants' comprehension of the importance of becoming more emotionally self-aware.

Overall, the project experience demonstrated that the development of emotional self-awareness in the target group is needed, and it creates engagement and deepening in participants' sharing. However, the facilitating structure in developing those skills as the main core of the peer group context was not seen as aligned with participants' needs for flexibility and freedom of sharing, as explained before. For that, even though I consider the project a successful experience in its aims and objectives, I recommend that future projects aiming the increase participants' emotional self-awareness are meant to be formatted in a workshop model. Nevertheless, future peer groups can benefit from the knowledge and tools acquired in this project while using it as complementary activities. I argue last that the workshop format can be extended through other stakeholders' organizations.

Finally, important to note that this project implementation highly contributed to the development of my professional skills as I could practice social work methods within a real services provision environment. Moreover, analyzing Diakkonia's references on the requirements of competencies for a bachelor's in social services (DIAK, 2022), for instance, I developed and improved skills regarding mainly: a) supporting individual growth and development, families' everyday lives and family relationships, b) planning, implementing and evaluating customers' service processes in a participatory manner; c) matching needs and services and drive change; d) innovatively solving problems and participating in networks in the development of the social sector; e) developing customer service methods, working practices, and service processes with a partnership approach; and f) planning, implementing and evaluating development projects.

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## APPENDIX A. Survey for assessing participants' knowledge and needs

## Fathers' group survey

7  
Responses08:03  
Average time to completeActive  
Status

## 1. Please add the first letter of your name and surname

7  
ResponsesLatest Responses  
"PR"  
"G Godfred"  
"RB"2. In your everyday life, **how comfortable are you** when you need to **express your feelings** verbally and non-verbally (1= not comfortable at all, 5= neutral, 10= very comfortable)7  
Responses6.57  
Average Number3. Are you aware of **how recognizing emotions can relate to self-development and wellbeing?**

● Yes, I am	6
● Maybe	1
● Not sure	0
● No, I am not	0



4. How motivated do you feel about attending activities focusing on fatherhood and expressing emotions?

Very motivated	3
Somewhat motivated	3
Neither motivated nor unmotiva...	1
Somewhat unmotivated	0
Very unmotivated	0



5. If a friend asked you today to explain to him/her the general benefits of expressing emotions, how confident would you be?

Very confident	2
Somewhat confident	3
Neither confident nor hesitant	1
Somewhat hesitant	1
Very hesitant	0



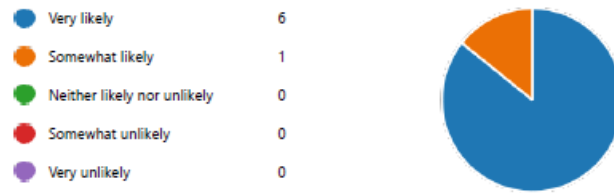
6. When you feel angry at someone, how likely would you handle the situation constructively? ( E.g. by verbalizing your feelings, request your needs, handle a confrontation, take a break, initiate a conversation or use "I" terms instead of "you" during a heated situation)

Very likely	1
Somewhat likely	3
Neither likely nor unlikely	1
Somewhat unlikely	2
Very unlikely	0



7. What do you think, how likely the use of empathetic communication skills and emotional self-awareness would strengthen the relationship between you and your child?





8. Please describe with **3 words** what **fatherhood means** to you:

7  
Responses

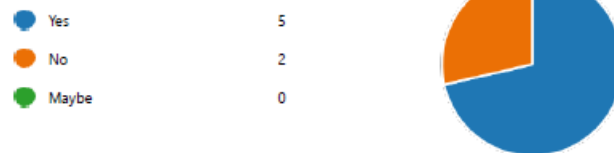
Latest Responses  
*"Softness Fulfillment Care"*  
*"role, responsibility, empathy"*  
*"caring, joy, family"*

9. Please write **one or two sentences** about your **expectations** towards the the peer group activities (E.g.: "I would like to learn something new; I would want to get to know other fathers; I would like to know more about fatherhood and emotions etc.")

7  
Responses

Latest Responses  
*"I would like to share the life with other fathers."*  
*"Community of practice or learning to share and sharing t..."*  
*"Meet new people and exchange our experience with fathe..."*

10. Have you heard about Familia ry before ?



11. Have you previously attended any peer support group activities?



12. Rate the topics/activities accordingly to how much you are interested in it within these group meetings (1= not interested, 2-3-4= somewhat in between, 5= very interested)

