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# Parents' perceptions and evaluation of the implementation of a resilience curriculum in Greek schools

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates parental perceptions and evaluation of the implementation of a European resilience-focused curriculum (RESCUR) in a sample of Greek schools. RESCUR, which includes six resilience-promoting skill areas, was implemented in 28 elementary classrooms in the Southern region of Crete, Greece. Parental perceptions and views were considered to be an important component (among others) of this implementation study and they were studied as part of comprehensive program evaluation. With the completion of the program, a sample of 100 participant students' parents evaluated aspects of the program that they found helpful for their child, for themselves and their family through a questionnaire including quantitative and qualitative questions. Correlations and content analysis showed that according to parents, RESCUR was overall effective in promoting communication skills, self-determination skills, and healthy relationships both for them and their children, while significant relationships were found among helpfulness of RESCUR for the child, the parent, and the family. The results suggest that parental perceptions and views are an important component of school-based resilience interventions worth studying because useful information about implementation can be identified for the optimization of the program. Implications for future RESCUR implementation and research are discussed.

School environments are uniquely suited to help children cultivate and promote social-emotional learning skills and resilience skills. These skills may prove to be helpful for the individual in the long run, because they may reduce the cumulative effects of a variety of at-risk factors and promote the protective factors (Benson, 2002; Doll & Lyon, 1998; Durlak, 1995).

Research in the last decade has underscored the effectiveness of the "whole school" prevention approach for all children, as a valuable means to implement evidence-based prevention programs which promote the wellbeing and resilience of children from the early years all the way to the late elementary years (Cefai et al., 2018). As Bernard (1991) and Benson (2002) argue, by cultivating a positive environment within families, schools, and communities and by building skills, we can make a significant difference in reducing the risk factors in children's lives.

A resilience-focused paradigm for education has been proposed as a guiding philosophy and there is mounting evidence regarding resilience and positive youth development, both academically and socially. Educators can adopt such an approach in order to achieve resilience-focused, transformative schools (Nicoll, 2014). The aforementioned researcher proposes a resilience-focused, systemic paradigm to guide educational practice, which includes the domains of curricular and instructional quality, physiological and neurological functioning, school environment, family environment, classroom environment, and community environment.

During the last fifteen years, several resilience programs have been presented in the literature which can be implemented in schools, including Academic Resilience Approach from the UK (Hart, 2016); Bounce Back from Australia (McGrath & Noble, 2011); PATHS program (Greenberg & Kusché, 2006) and Rochester Resilience program (Cowen & Wyman, 1998) from the USA; and Khazimula Project from South Africa (Jefferis, van Rensurg, Khambule, Bouwer, & Theron, 2013). There is ongoing research to document the efficacy of these programs.

In this list of resilience programs, a new European resilience program called "RESCUR-Surfing the Waves" has been added. The program was developed by a consortium of European Universities on

a collaborative basis, and it has now entered the stage of implementation. The present study is the first implementation study of the RESCUR in the Greek educational system and it follows the path of a relevant recent study in Malta (Cefai et al., 2018), which evaluated the RESCUR program in the European context. This study investigates parental perceptions of the effectiveness of RESCUR as a component of program evaluation. Children's and teachers' voices were also recorded in the implementation process of the study, but the focus of the present paper is on parental perceptions and evaluation regarding the implementation of RESCUR.

RESCUR adapts Bronfenbrenner's (1989, 2005) ecosystemic approach and further emphasizes the importance of the social context in supporting at-risk children and providing a protective environment for them to flourish. In addition to the ecosystemic approach, the RESCUR program has adopted a resilience framework that is based on a transactional approach (Sameroff, 2009) in understanding resilience. This approach places emphasis on simultaneously teaching direct *resilience skills* in a structured way and promoting resilience *processes* in the different microsystems (e.g. schools, family, community), with the overall aim to create fertile environments for promoting children's, teachers' and parents' resilience (Cefai et al., 2014). Emphasis on the resilience *processes* means that in the microsystem of the family, the collaboration of parents and children on the RESCUR activities may promote resilience-inducing processes for the whole family. Through the RESCUR activities, parents and children learn to better communicate, share their experiences and knowledge and focus on positive emotions and family bonds. Thus, RESCUR promotes an ecological, whole-family resilience approach. Moreover, in the microsystem of the school, there is a focus on the ecology of the classroom, teacher behaviors, and attitudes, classroom management style, classroom relationships, pedagogy, and the school as a whole. In addition, this approach takes into consideration the systemic variables of the school district. RESCUR is delivered to the whole classroom by teachers who have been trained in RESCUR and is designed to be part of the mainstream curriculum.

Parental participation and involvement in the RESCUR have been a significant priority during the development phase of the program (Cefai et al., 2015). For this reason, a manual for parents has been included in the prevention program in order to enhance parental participation and include parents as important stakeholders, with the aim of promoting all learning focused on the acquisition of resilience skills in schools (Cefai et al., 2015).

Parental involvement and participation have been shown to be connected with positive outcomes in children's lives (Jeyes, 2011). For example, parental involvement has been found to positively impact students' academic success (Wang & Sheikl-Khalil, 2014), to improve literacy for students (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011), to increase homework completion (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008), and to support positive classroom behavior (Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). In addition to promoting academic success, parental involvement positively impacts adolescent mental health (Wang & Sheikl-Khalil, 2014). Furthermore, it has been well documented that parental involvement increases successful outcomes for children and youth in promoting resilience (Hoover-Dempsey, Ice, & Whitaker, 2009).

Parents as partners in any school-based program are crucial in helping the program become successful and given that parental involvement in school promotes resilience, educators must recognize that parental involvement can be expressed in a variety of ways (Zolkoski, Sayman, & Lewis-Chiu, 2018). Zolkoski et al. (2018) propose the RESILIENCE model to conceptualize and encourage parental involvement and argue that by implementing strategies provided in this framework meaningful partnerships, communication, and ultimately resilience is promoted in children and youth.

Elbertson, Brackett, and Weissberg (2010) mention that according to CASEL (Consortium of Academic Social and Emotional Learning), in reference to the implementation of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs in schools and for the purpose of successful implementation and sustainability, nurturing partnerships with family and community are essential for these programs to be successful. It has been advocated that a key component for the success of SEL programs is the involvement of students' families (Christenson & Havsy, 2004; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007). Research has linked parental involvement in school to improvements in mental health and academic performance in children (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry, 1999). Thus, effective SEL and resilience programs should include and foster the development of school–family partnerships to support and extend classroom learning and positive outcomes for students.

Parental involvement has also been underscored in the 1997 White Paper, 'Excellence in Schools' (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 1997) in the UK. The strategy described in the White Paper included three elements: providing parents with

information; giving parents a voice, and encouraging parental partnerships with schools. Along the same lines, a 2003 British study further supported parental involvement, underscoring that it can significantly improve pupil achievement and that parents exert their influence indirectly through shaping the child's self-concept as a learner and through setting high aspirations (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Parental perceptions and views on the implementation of a resilience program are a significant aspect of the implementation of any prevention program (Wolfe, 2014) and therefore should be examined when evaluating the effectiveness of such programs. In a study of a resilience program, namely the UK Resilience Program (based on the Penn Resiliency Program from the US), parental voices were recorded in order to promote meaningful home-school collaborations and understand empowerment as a process fostering parental engagement (Wolfe, 2014).

Parental perceptions and views about the implementation of a prevention school-based program such as RESCUR are significant and they require further investigation. The rationale of this investigation is that parental perceptions are an important component of program evaluation, which aims to promote positive changes in the future implementation of the program in Greece and other European countries. In addition, parental perceptions and evaluation of the implementation of RESCUR can also contribute to an increased school-home communication framework benefiting the children. In this study, parents' perceptions were studied as part of a wider evaluation (including teachers and students) which is not presented in this paper. Parents' views can offer a critical external point of view and may provide useful suggestions for further improving RESCUR procedures or delivery of key themes of the program.

In conclusion, the present study aims to investigate parental perceptions and views regarding the implementation of a new European innovative resilience program namely RESCUR in Greek schools. So far, no study has been conducted to investigate the overall effectiveness of RESCUR in Greek schools, and in that aspect, neither parental views and perceptions about the implementation of RESCUR in Greek schools have been explored. The present study comes to fill this specific gap in the literature.

## RESCUR: surfing the waves: presentation of the resilience curriculum and process of implementation in Greek elementary schools

RESCUR is a European Resilience Program funded by the European Union and developed by six European University partners. Following its initial development

(Cefai et al., 2015), there is a significant need to further pursue implementation studies in different European countries in order to ascertain its effectiveness and usefulness for children, parents, and educators.

The RESCUR program includes six main themes: a. Developing communication skills, b. Building healthy relationships, c. Developing a growth mind-set, d. Developing self-determination, e. Building on one's strengths and f. Turning challenges into opportunities. The themes of RESCUR have been developed based on literature review and clinical experience in the schools. These six themes, which constituted the theoretical basis for analyzing parental perceptions of the effectiveness of RESCUR, aim to promote the following resilience skills (Cefai et al., 2015).

The first theme, *Developing communication skills*, is focused on the development of communication skills, including listening and understanding others, and expressing and standing for oneself. Activities in this theme focus on the expression of feelings and needs, standing for oneself and assertive conflict resolution. Effective listening, empathy, and communication ideas are also taught and reinforced with experiential activities.

The activities of the second theme, *Building Healthy relationships*, are designed to cultivate social and pro-social skills in order to create a strong network of positive relationships, focusing on such skills as making and having friends, seeking and providing support, and nurturing relationships. Children are also taught to seek and provide support to others facing difficulties, cooperative skills, empathy, moral reasoning, and recognizing and appreciating the motives, behaviors, desires, and feelings of others in the family and school context.

The third theme, *Developing a growth mind-set*, is focused on cognitive processes such as optimistic thinking and positive self-talk. It also entails activities that teach children how to dispute negative thoughts. Activities also focus on emotional processes such as the awareness, expression, and regulation of positive emotions. Humor is also used to positively appraise a stressful experience or life event. Children are taught to focus on hope and happiness because this orientation fosters resilience.

The fourth theme, *Developing self-determination*, includes activities that build on problem orientation and problem-solving skills, empowerment, and autonomy and helping children to advocate for their own rights.

The fifth theme, *Building on Strengths*, focuses on two areas, namely building a positive self-concept and self-esteem, and using strengths in academic and social

engagement. Activities in this theme focus on valuing oneself and others, understanding, and appreciating one's strengths and assets and using such strengths in academic learning and social interactions.

The last theme, *Turning challenges into opportunities*, aims to teach children a tough-mindedness mind-set. Activities help children acquire skills to deal with rejection by teachers, peers, and family members and negative emotions due to this adversity such as stress, anger, disappointment, frustration, sadness, and a sense of helplessness. Activities on how to deal with bullying, family conflict, divorce, and other family stressors, as well as helping children to learn how to deal with change, transitions, and loss in life are also included in the present theme.

The above themes address the key resilience competencies children need in order to overcome barriers and stressors in their development and continue to develop cognitively, socially and emotionally despite adversity (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993; Doll, Brehm, & Zucker, 2004; Hart & Heaver, 2013; Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012; Werner & Smith, 1992).

RESCUR has been designed for three age levels, namely early years (4–6 years), early elementary (7–9 years), and late elementary (10–12 years), underlining the importance of early intervention in resilience building (Dodge et al., 2014; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). As pointed out by Cefai et al. (2018), the activities follow the "Sequential, Active, Focused, Explicit (SAFE) approach, namely a sequenced step-by-step approach (Sequenced), experiential and participative learning (Active), a focus on skills development (Focused), and explicit learning goals (Explicit) (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, & Taylor, 2011; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017)" (p. 4).

A take-home activity for each school-based resilience lesson is also provided, which parents and children complete together so that they can process and practice what is learned at school. This take-home activity aims to keep the parents informed about resilience lessons at school and get them to be more involved with their children in different themes and experiential exercises promoting resilience.

A recent study on RESCUR in Malta (Cefai et al., 2018) focused on children's resilience and the implementation of the program in kindergarten centers in Malta over a one-year period. A post-intervention study in 20 classrooms (97 children) showed an improvement in resilience skills, prosocial behavior, and learning engagement, but not in internalized and externalized problem behaviors. A small-scale study in two nurture classes in two of the schools yielded similar findings. This Maltese RESCUR study suggests that there are indications that the program, as

a proportionate universal intervention for early years, leads to an improvement in social and academic behaviors in kindergarten children.

In the present implementation study called the Festos Resilience Project, the RESCUR program was implemented in a sample of Greek school classrooms by 28 teachers. The program in Greek is called "RESCUR: An Obstacle, An Opportunity!". All participating teachers were teaching (at the time of implementation) at elementary schools in the southern part of Crete, Greece, and more specifically all of them taught in the greater school district of Festos. The 28 classrooms participating in the program included 530 students in total.

RESCUR training duration was 25 hours and training sessions were spread on two consecutive weekends in October 2017. The training was done by the first two authors of the Greek version of RESCUR, who are members of the RESCUR consortium which created the specific resilience program. RESCUR program implementation started immediately after the training in October and was concluded at the end of the school year in June 2018.

Regarding the involvement of parents in the implementation of RESCUR, the following actions were taken. All parents of the schools included in the greater Festos school district were informed through their school administrators and via the local press about an open event-lecture about resilience, their role and the implementation of RESCUR in their child's school. A significant number of parents attended this meeting, which was organized by the Municipality of Festos, and received directions on how to actively engage with the RESCUR materials at home. During the meeting, parents were informed about the parents' manual of RESCUR, which was made available to them for free. Parents were encouraged to get it and study it as resource material for the implementation of the program. No further training focused on parents took place in the present implementation study.

Upon recommendations of the trainers, all teachers who participated in the RESCUR training met with all the parents of their class as a group and informed them about the start of an innovative program. Teachers emphasized the need for the active involvement of the parents in order to further reinforce the RESCUR lessons. Parents were encouraged to work collaboratively on all homework worksheets which their child would bring at home based on RESCUR lessons at school. In that initial meeting, all teachers emphasized that parental participation is important for maximizing the benefits for their child.

Three months after the initial training in RESCUR, the researchers had a follow-up meeting with all 28 teachers, in order to provide support and supervision and also consult with the teachers regarding implementation issues of RESCUR. The group also discussed possible obstacles and challenges to overcome for more effective implementation of the resilience program. A number of questions and issues were raised regarding modification of activities due to time constraints or regarding activities to be taught. The researchers were available and provided further support to the teachers via phone and e-mail during the entire school year.

Finally, the researchers met with the whole group at the end of the school year to discuss implementation issues and related questions and reflect on challenges. In this meeting, the researchers collected data based on an evaluation protocol discussed previously with the teachers.

Among other evaluation data, parents completed and returned to the researchers questionnaires focused on their perceptions and views of the effectiveness of RESCUR during the one year of implementation in their child's classroom. In the following section, we present preliminary post-intervention parental evaluation data, based on parents' perceptions and views regarding the effectiveness of RESCUR in promoting positive changes in their child's behavior, in themselves and in overall family climate. The following research questions were posed regarding the parental evaluation of RESCUR:

According to parents' views:

a. Has their child's participation in the RESCUR program proved to be effective in bringing positive changes to the child's behavior?
b. Is the perceived helpfulness of RESCUR for the child, related to the perceived helpfulness of the program for the parent and for the family climate?
c. Which aspects of the RESCUR program, based on the six RESCUR themes, have proved to be more effective and more important in promoting positive family climate?
d. Which are the barriers to the effective implementation of RESCUR? What aspects of the current implementation should be altered in the future?

## Method

The present study is a post-intervention evaluation study incorporating a mixed-methods approach in the

analysis of questionnaire data, in order to address the above research questions about parental perceptions of RESCUR following the implementation of RESCUR in schools.

### Participants, data collection, and instrumentation

The sample of the present study consisted of 100 individuals, who were parents to children participating in the RESCUR program. The children attended elementary schools (grades first to sixth) belonging to the greater Festos Municipality school district in Crete, Greece. Data collection took place at the end of the school year (last week of May until the first week of June 2018). Teachers gave their students an official letter addressed to the parents, along with an attached evaluation questionnaire asking for parental feedback in evaluating the implementation of RESCUR. Parents completed the questionnaire at home and returned it to the teachers, who forwarded all the questionnaires to the research team.

### "Parental views and evaluation of RESCUR program" questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed by the research team and sixteen questions were designed to directly address the research questions of the study. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended, quantitative questions and open-ended, qualitative questions, which are described in detail in the following section. Both quantitative and qualitative questions were included in the questionnaire in order to fully capture the essence of a comprehensive evaluation of a prevention program and also address the range of research questions posed. Given the preliminary nature of this study, both types of questions (open- and closed-ended), were introduced in order to actively increase the validity of the instrument and with the aim to collect richer information about the overall effectiveness of the prevention program based on parents' perceptions. Eight quantitative questions allowed for measuring parental satisfaction with RESCUR and parental perception of program effectiveness, while eight qualitative questions allowed parents to describe specific aspects of program implementation which they considered effective, as well as proposed changes.

*Quantitative questions for parental evaluation of RESCUR effectiveness for children, parents, and family dynamics.* Participants were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the RESCUR program through a series of closed-ended, quantitative questions. Participants were asked to answer these questions on four-point

Likert scales. Parents were asked how often they spent time with their children on the RESCUR worksheet (1 = always, 4 = never); how helpful they thought the worksheet was (1 = highly helpful, 4 = unhelpful); whether their children mentioned aspects of the RESCUR program (1 = many times, 4 = never); their views on whether RESCUR was helpful for their child, for themselves and for family climate (1 = Highly helpful, 4 = Rather unhelpful, for all three questions); their views on overall effectiveness of RESCUR (1 = Highly effective, 4 = Rather ineffective); and their overall satisfaction by the program (1 = Highly satisfied, 4 = Rather unsatisfied). A sample question is *How helpful was the program for you personally, as a parent and as an individual?*.

*Qualitative questions on effective aspects of program implementation and proposed changes according to parental views.* A series of open-ended questions required participants to evaluate aspects of RESCUR which proved effective for their child and for the family, and aspects that might be changed to improve program effectiveness. Parents were asked what aspects of the program were mentioned by their child; specific areas that helped their child or behavioral changes observed; and specific areas that were helpful for them and for their family. They were also asked to mention the strengths of RESCUR, and propose areas that might need improvement or changes for future implementation (sample question: *Please mention specific areas of the RESCUR program which were helpful for you personally*.)

### Data analysis

Statistics software SPSS v. 22 was used for data analysis of quantitative questions. Quantitative questions were analyzed with descriptive statistics procedures and bivariate correlations in order to measure parental evaluation of RESCUR effectiveness for children, parents, and family dynamics. Qualitative questions were analyzed based on the principles of content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Stemler, 2001), with the aim of identifying specific areas of the RESCUR program which were considered more helpful/important in promoting positive family dynamics, as well as specific changes proposed by parents to maximize future effectiveness of the program. For each one of the qualitative questions mentioned above, a coding scheme was developed combining deductive and inductive procedures. Reading and coding of the qualitative data were done by all three members of the research team, who engaged with the data in order to develop a coding

scheme. The coding scheme mainly consisted of six deductive categories, which were based on the six themes of the RESCUR program described in the Introduction (namely 'Developing a Growth Mindset', 'Hope, Happiness and Humour', 'Building on Strengths', 'Developing Self-Determination', 'Developing Communication Skills', 'Establishing and Maintaining Healthy Relationships', 'Turning Challenges into Opportunities'). Inductive categories included other areas mentioned by participants, which were not comprised in the six program themes. This method of developing a coding scheme was aimed at examining which areas among the six RESCUR areas were mentioned more and thus were considered more helpful for parental and family wellbeing, and which areas were considered less helpful by parents. Thus, the coding scheme was based on the RESCUR theoretical framework detailed in the introduction. Categories were considered mutually exclusive and exhaustive. For example, regarding the question on which RESCUR areas were helpful to parents, a participant answered 'more family bonding'. This answer would be categorized under 'Establishing and Maintaining Healthy Relationships' according to the RESCUR themes (see the relevant section in the Introduction).

In order to develop the coding scheme for parents' answers to each qualitative question, an initial set of codes was developed cooperatively by members of the research team with the procedure mentioned above. Part of the data was coded independently by two members of the research team, and codes were compared in order to reach consensus and thus increase reliability in the coding between the two research team members. This procedure aimed to increase the credibility of the qualitative data analysis. Each specific area mentioned by participants in each question was considered as a coding unit, thus multiple answers were allowed per question. For example, regarding the question mentioned above, a participant answered 'more family bonding' and 'new knowledge', thus two different codes would be assigned to this answer.

Following the creation of the coding scheme for each qualitative question, frequencies (percentages) were calculated for each category. Categories, respective category percentages and category content for each qualitative question are presented in detail in the 'Results' section. Thus, analysis of the qualitative data included both a quantitative component (extraction of category percentages) and a qualitative component (analysis of category content including participants' quotes). The inclusion of both components allowed for increasing the rigor of the analysis, for a more comprehensive and systematic account of parents'

views on effective aspects of RESCUR, and for incorporating both a more inductive and a more deductive aspect in the analysis (Bryman, 2006; White & Marsh, 2006).

## Results

### Quantitative analyses on parental evaluation of RESCUR effectiveness for children, parents, and family

Quantitative analyses were performed in order to examine parental perceptions of RESCUR effectiveness and helpfulness for the child, the parent, and the family. The vast majority of parents (93%) mentioned that their child brought RESCUR worksheets at home, as opposed to only 5% who mentioned that their child did not bring the program worksheets at home. Means and standard deviations for measures on the parental evaluation of RESCUR are presented in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, regarding time spent discussing RESCUR worksheets with their child, most participants mentioned that they always or at least sometimes found time to discuss the worksheets, while most participants mentioned that RESCUR worksheets were highly helpful or helpful. Regarding parental views on the

helpfulness of RESCUR for their children, most parents indicated that their child talked to them about the RESCUR program many times or sometimes. Most parents indicated that the program was quite helpful for their child; for them personally, as a parent and as an individual; and that it was quite helpful or moderately helpful for their family climate. Regarding the overall evaluation of the program, participants deemed RESCUR to be overall quite effective and indicated that they were quite satisfied with the implementation of RESCUR (see Table 1).

One of the research questions posed was whether the effectiveness of RESCUR for children was related to its effectiveness for parents and family according to parental views. Thus, a series of bivariate correlations were performed on the above-mentioned, quantitative questions on the helpfulness of RESCUR for the parent, child, and family, parental time spent on RESCUR worksheets, frequency of child mentioning RESCUR at home, parental evaluation of effectiveness of RESCUR, and parental satisfaction with RESCUR (see Table 1). As seen on Table 1, the more participants evaluated RESCUR as helpful for themselves as parents/individuals, the more involved they were with the program worksheets by spending time with their child on

**Table 1.** Intercorrelations, means and standard deviations for quantitative measures on parental evaluation of RESCUR for their children and for themselves and the family climate (N = 100).

| Measure | 1. Parental time spent on RESCUR worksheets | 2. Helpfulness of RESCUR worksheets | 3. How often their child mentioned RESCUR | 4. Helpfulness of RESCUR for their child | 5. Helpfulness of RESCUR for parent | 6. Helpfulness of RESCUR for family climate | 7. Parental evaluation of overall effectiveness of RESCUR | 8. Parental satisfaction with RESCUR program |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Parental time spent on RESCUR worksheets | - | .23* | .31** | .25* | .30** | .10 | .16 | .19 |
| 2. Helpfulness of RESCUR worksheets | | - | .36*** | .41*** | .34** | .35*** | .50*** | .41*** |
| 3. How often their child mentioned RESCUR | | | - | .52*** | .26** | .35** | .50*** | .40*** |
| 4. Helpfulness of RESCUR for their child | | | | - | .60*** | .51*** | .75*** | .67*** |
| 5. Helpfulness of RESCUR for parent | | | | | - | .75*** | .51*** | .60*** |
| 6. Helpfulness of RESCUR for family climate | | | | | | - | .54*** | .58*** |
| 7. Parental evaluation of overall effectiveness of RESCUR | | | | | | | - | .52*** |
| 8. Parental satisfaction with RESCUR program | | | | | | | | - |
| $M^a$ | 1.66 | 1.87 | 1.70 | 2.10 | 2.22 | 2.37 | 2.06 | 2.01 |
| SD | 0.73 | 0.74 | 0.89 | 0.75 | 0.83 | 0.89 | 0.79 | 0.81 |

[a]Scale range for all measures is 1–4. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

them ($r(97) = .30$, $p = .003$), the more they thought their child mentioned RESCUR at home ($r(96) = .26$, $p = .009$) and the more they thought RESCUR was helpful for their child ($r(97) = .60$, $p < .001$). Moreover, strong positive correlations were found among helpfulness of RESCUR for the parent, helpfulness for family climate and parental evaluation of RESCUR. The more parents thought RESCUR was helpful for them personally, the more they indicated that RESCUR was helpful for their family climate ($r(96) = .75$, $p < .001$), and the more they deemed RESCUR to be effective ($r(95) = .51$, $p < .001$) and expressed their satisfaction with the program ($r(94) = .60$, $p < .001$). As shown by these results, the more parents participated in doing RESCUR homework assignments with their child and thought that RESCUR was helpful for their child, the more they thought that it was helpful for them personally and for their family.

## Qualitative analyses on parental views regarding effective aspects of program implementation for the child, the parent, and the family

Besides the quantitative analyses examining the parental evaluation of RESCUR, content analysis was performed to the open-ended questions of the "Parental views and evaluation of RESCUR program" questionnaire in order to gain more insights on parental views regarding specific effective aspects of RESCUR. Content categories for each qualitative question are presented based on the coding scheme mentioned in the Method section, which draws on the six themes of RESCUR's theoretical framework for resilience. Parental views are examined in relation to these broad curriculum themes. For each question, category percentages are presented in Tables (2–7). Sample answers are provided within each curriculum theme category, which voice participants' opinions on RESCUR areas that they found particularly helpful for their child, themselves and their family. It should be noted that all positive changes of the child, the parent, and the

**Table 2.** Aspects of RESCUR mentioned at home by the child: Category labels and category percentages (N = 91).[a]

| Category label | Category percentage |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Developing communication skills | 29.7% |
| 2. Developing self-determination | 24.2% |
| 3. Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships | 19.8% |
| 4. Developing a growth mind-set | 9.9% |
| 5. Structure/activities of RESCUR | 8.8% |
| 6. Building on strengths | 4.4% |
| 7. Turning challenges into opportunities | 2.2% |
| 8. Nothing mentioned | 1.1% |

[a]In this and all subsequent Tables of this section, N refers to number of answers coded and not to number of participants.

family climate attributed to RESCUR and reported by the parents themselves need to be placed in the context of their own observations in a post-intervention research setup and not in a pre- and post-treatment (RESCUR) design.

*Parental views on effective aspects of RESCUR for the child: aspects mentioned at home by the child and aspects that proved helpful to the child or fostered positive behavioral changes.* Participants indicated strategies or ideas mentioned by their child at home during the child's participation in RESCUR. Categories for parental views on aspects of RESCUR mentioned by the child are presented in Table 2, along with category percentages. As shown in Table 2, the most frequent area mentioned by children at home was the theme of communication skills. As indicated by parents, children mentioned aspects of the program such as self-expression, assertiveness, active listening, or conflict resolution. As mentioned by one parent, "My child learned that we are all equal and that we can all be friends; he/she learned ways to protect ourselves and our friends from our enemies". Many parents also mentioned listening skills and the value of dialogue. Thus, parents reported that communication skills learnt by their children included both expressing and standing for oneself, and listening to others, which is consistent with RESCUR goals for this curriculum subtheme (Cefai et al., 2014).

Another frequent area mentioned by children, as indicated by parents, was self-determination skills, such as problem-solving skills, self-efficacy, and empowerment skills. One parent mentioned, "my child liked the stories where there was a problem and ways how to find solutions". Thus, parents attributed importance to this RESCUR theme of "Developing self-determination", which was aimed at building competence and autonomy through promoting problem-solving, empowerment, and self-efficacy skills (Cefai et al., 2014).

The third most frequent category mentioned by children pertained to the development of healthy relationships, with skills such as cooperation, empathy, support, and positive relationships. One parent mentioned that "Yes, I observed [changes] in the way that he/she treats others, in the way that he/she is kinder and treats his/her friends and his/her siblings". Thus, parents seem to positively evaluate this RESCUR theme of "Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships", which was aimed at developing and maintaining a network of positive relationships, seeking, and providing support in order to promote well-being and resilience in children (Cefai et al., 2014).

Other areas, less frequently mentioned by children, pertained to the theme of 'growth mindset' (such as positive thinking, goal-setting), to specific activities or practical aspects of RESCUR, and to the themes of 'building on strengths' (self-esteem) and 'turning challenges into opportunities' (such as optimism, reframing). As mentioned by a parent, "my child learned that we do not give up with the first obstacle and we press on". Parents reported that their child benefited from the program as it helped them deal with their stress. For example, one parent mentioned that the child "learned not to have stress and think about positives and not only negatives". Another parent mentioned that "my child learned positive behaviors and how to manage stress".

Parents were also asked to indicate aspects of RESCUR that proved beneficial to their child. As shown in Table 3, here again, the vast majority of answers related to the theme 'Developing communication skills', with parents indicating that their children learned to actively listen to others, express their feelings, discuss with others and demonstrate interpersonal relationships skills. As mentioned by one parent, "Through the program, my child learned that when he/she can't have what he/she wants immediately, he/she can now show patience and have it later. He/she overcomes the problem more easily now." Negotiating with others, expressing oneself and regulating emotions were thus considered important by parents, which are consistent with "Developing communication skills" subtheme goals of RESCUR (Cefai et al., 2014).

Another important theme indicated by parents was fostering healthy relationships; their children learned to cooperate with others, respect, and accept others and show supportive behavior. Other parents simply mentioned that they observed behavioral changes happening in their child, without specific explanation, and 'self-determination' (such as problem-solving, empowerment, or diligence) was also an important area of skills learned. One parent mentioned that "[The child]

started to talk about his/her problems, and try to find solutions for various situations."

The themes of 'growth mindset' (fostering optimism) and 'building on strengths' (fostering of a child's self-esteem) were mentioned a few times. As reported by one parent, their child said that she learned "not to be afraid and all problems can be overcome". Another parent mentioned that "the child learned to accept and love himself". Few parents indicated that they observed no behavioral changes, or that they acquired new knowledge in general (see Table 3).

*Parental views on effective aspects of RESCUR for the parent and for the family: aspects that proved helpful to the parent and to the family climate.* Parents were asked to mention specific areas of RESCUR that proved beneficial to them personally, both as parents and as individuals. As was the case with areas that proved helpful for the child, the majority of parental answers regarding skills learnt pertain to the RESCUR theme 'Developing communication skills' (see Table 4 for category percentages for this question). Many parents indicated that they learned to emphasize discussion regarding important issues in the family, and to better communicate with their child. As mentioned by one parent, "[I learnt to] discuss about many more things [than before] drawing upon particular moments." Or, with the words of another parent, "I found ways of saying things to the child without being tense." As mentioned by another parent, "we understood that we can talk about everything and the more we talk, the easier it becomes to find a solution to the problem. This program brought us closer to one another". Two other parents, underscoring the usefulness of RESCUR in terms of the development of communication skills, reported the following: "I learned to listen carefully to my child's desires" and "this program gave me the opportunity to interact with my child a bit more and to communicate". Thus, according to parents, "Developing communication skills" was a key set of

**Table 3.** Parental views on aspects of RESCUR that proved helpful to their child: Category labels and category percentages (N = 116).

| Category label | Category percentage |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Developing communication skills | 40.5% |
| 2. Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships | 17.2% |
| 3. Behavioral changes observed in child | 11.2% |
| 4. Developing self-determination | 11.2% |
| 5. Developing a growth mind-set | 8.6% |
| 6. No changes observed | 5.2% |
| 7. Building on strengths | 4.3% |
| 8. New knowledge | 1.7% |

**Table 4.** Aspects of RESCUR that proved helpful to the parent: Category labels and category percentages (N = 86).

| Category label | Category percentage |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Developing communication skills | 38.4% |
| 2. Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships | 27.9% |
| 3. Developing self-determination | 12.8% |
| 4. New knowledge | 12.8% |
| 5. Not helpful | 3.5% |
| 6. Turning challenges into opportunities | 2.3% |
| 7. Positive changes in child | 2.3% |

skills not only for their child, as shown above, but also for the parent himself/herself; this view is consistent with the RESCUR goal to engage not only students but also parents and other members of the community in the promotion of important life skills (Cefai et al., 2014).

Another relevant area mentioned by many parents was the theme of 'Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships', where parents indicated that through RESCUR they gained a better understanding of their child's emotions, needs and way of thinking (empathy, disclosure of information, child-parent bonding). One parent wrote that "[The program] helped us only in the sense that we talked and described to our child some very hard situations, which we had never discussed before." Another parent wrote, "we talked more, we laughed more and we played more". In the words of another parent, "the program helped us to support our child to be self-confident".

Other parents' answers related to 'self-determination' skills such as empowerment, sense of meaning through creativity, better problem-solving, and self-efficacy. In this regard, one parent mentioned that "I was helped in many ways because when I'm facing an obstacle or problem, I read the book we have and I find solutions." Other parents mentioned that they gained new knowledge, while fewer parents mentioned that the program offered little help to them, mainly because of time restraints or because they were not sufficiently involved. Still fewer answers related to the skill of reframing ('Turning challenges into opportunities') and positive changes observed in their child.

Participants were also asked to indicate specific areas where RESCUR proved helpful for their family. Category percentages for this question are presented in Table 5. As seen in Table 5, in this case, too, the vast majority of answers pertained to the RESCUR theme 'Developing communication skills.' Many parents thought that their family benefited from RESCUR because they learned to better communicate with their child, to better manage conflict in the family, to achieve dialogue, active listening skills, forgiveness, and other

interpersonal skills. One parent wrote that "[During the program], we had a task that helped us discuss with one another at home, to see what Aristea and Hercules [mascots of the program] are doing and work with the child on this exercise-task." Another parent mentioned that "Hercules and Aristea and their stories and obstacles helped us as much as they helped our child", and still another parent reported that "There is now a deeper 'sharing' of his/her school experiences."

Another related area was that of fostering healthy relationships, where parents indicated that their family developed tighter bonds. Thus, many parents mentioned that their families benefited from communication and cooperation skills, all of which according to them led to a more positive family climate. With the words of one parent, "[Family climate was influenced] very much, because the child learned to share his/her toys with his/her siblings." Similarly, another parent mentioned, "[I saw a change in] her behavior towards her brother."

Other areas mentioned were problem-solving skills (Developing self-determination), positive changes in the child in terms of cognition or behavior, optimistic and positive thinking (Developing a growth mind-set), and gaining new knowledge about family relationships. One parent wrote that "While working on these tasks, we laughed and didn't worry about making mistakes. So we learned to work happily and calmly." Few parents indicated that they saw little benefits, mainly because of lack of time and involvement.

*Parental views on the strengths of RESCUR program and parental proposals for changes and improvements in the future implementation of RESCUR.* Strengths of the RESCUR program according to parents are congruent with the areas mentioned in the previous sections. Category percentages for this question are shown in Table 6. Most parents indicated that the program fostered communication skills in the family, as well as self-determination skills and interpersonal skills needed to establish and maintain healthy relationships. In this

**Table 5.** Aspects of RESCUR that proved beneficial for family climate: Category labels and category percentages (N = 83).

| Category label | Category percentage |
|---|---|
| 1. Developing communication skills | 44.6% |
| 2. Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships | 18.1% |
| 3. Developing self-determination | 14.5% |
| 4. Little change observed | 7.2% |
| 5. Positive changes in child/beneficial for child | 6.0% |
| 6. Developing a growth mind-set | 4.8% |
| 7. New knowledge | 4.8% |

**Table 6.** Parental views on the strengths of RESCUR program: Category labels and category percentages (N = 81).

| Category label | Category percentage |
|---|---|
| 1. Developing communication skills | 25.9% |
| 2. Developing self-determination | 23.5% |
| 3. Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships | 17.3% |
| 4. Positive changes in child/Beneficial for child | 13.6% |
| 5. Structure/activities of RESCUR | 8.6% |
| 6. New knowledge (for parent) | 4.9% |
| 7. Parental participation and contact with school | 3.7% |
| 8. General satisfaction with the program | 2.5% |

regard, one parent mentioned that "Children and parents had some 'bonding time' to discuss the themes and to spend some time together." Another parent mentioned that "you learn to see obstacles in a new light". Other parents mentioned that RESCUR fostered positive changes in their child or proved otherwise beneficial for the child. With the words of one parent, "One of the strongest aspects of the program for my child's learning were concepts of friendship, diversity and learning to help each other". Fewer parents commented positively on the program's structure or activities, such as the main characters or concepts, or indicated that they gained new knowledge themselves. Some parents also expressed satisfaction for participating in school activities or general satisfaction with RESCUR.

Parents were also asked to indicate proposed changes concerning the content or implementation process of RESCUR, as well as to provide specific proposals for improvement of RESCUR. As seen in Table 7, parental answers generally reflect satisfaction with RESCUR, as many parents indicated that they were satisfied with the program and had no changes to propose. A number of answers related to proposed changes in specific activities or mode of implementation of the program, such as by introducing more interactive implementation methods, for example, role-playing, cooperative activities for students, audiovisual resources, and experiential activities. Other parents pointed to the need for more parental involvement in such efforts and more parent-school communication, for example, through workshops for parents or communication sessions with teachers. With the words of one parent, "Play activities at school should sometimes involve parents. [I propose] teacher-parent briefing sessions." Parents expressed the desire for more meetings and discussions throughout the year. One parent wrote, "We needed more guidance and updating on the activities rather than just having another homework sheet to complete with our children". Thus, many parents commented that they desired to have a more active role in

future implementation of the program and wished to establish closer partnerships with teachers at school.

Certain program themes were also indicated as important areas for future learning, such as 'cooperation' or 'empowerment'. Some answers also pointed to the need of involving mental health experts, such as psychologists, in the future implementation of the program. Finally, some parents mentioned that it is necessary to extend RESCUR implementation in all school grades, include RESCUR in the compulsory curriculum or free more curriculum time for the implementation of the program. These answers indicate that parents recognize the necessity of more systematic inclusion of a resilience program throughout the school grades.

## Discussion

In the present study, a new European resilience curriculum named RESCUR was taught to a group of 28 teachers, who then implemented the program in their school classrooms. The overall study included evaluation data from students, teachers and parents, and analysis of the whole data set is yet to be completed. The present paper detailed the implementation of RESCUR in the Greek school sample and presented evaluation data provided *by parents* regarding their perceptions and views about RESCUR implementation and effectiveness.

One main conclusion of this study, based on the quantitative analyses of parental views as documented in Table 1, was that a significant relationship was established between helpfulness of RESCUR for the parent and positive family climate. The more parents thought the RESCUR program was helpful for them personally, the more they indicated that the program positively influenced them and their family climate. Moreover, parents who were more involved with RESCUR and thought it was helpful for their child, also reported that it was helpful for them personally as well as for their family.

According to parental perceptions and evaluation data, the family climate was improved and this improvement was mainly attributed to three RESCUR themes, namely "Developing communication skills", "Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships" and "Developing self-determination". Overall, the findings of the study documented a positive parental evaluation and high parental satisfaction with RESCUR implementation, supporting the view that the program fostered better communication and interpersonal skills while also building a positive family climate.

Other factors (inside or outside the family) may also have affected family dynamics at that point in time,

**Table 7.** Parental proposals for changes in future implementation of RESCUR and for the improvement of RESCUR: Category labels and category percentages (N = 83).

| Category label | Category percentage |
|---|---|
| 1. No changes needed/parental satisfaction | 37.3% |
| 2. Changes in specific activities/implementation procedures of RESCUR | 18.1% |
| 3. Need for more parental participation | 16.9% |
| 4. Proposals for program themes | 9.6% |
| 5. Involvement of mental health specialists | 8.4% |
| 6. Extend RESCUR implementation/include RESCUR in compulsory curriculum | 4.8% |
| 7. More schooltime for RESCUR implementation | 4.8% |

however, the researchers have relied solely on the written responses of parents to reach the above conclusions based on the post-intervention design of the study, which does not provide information on other possible mediating factors.

Fewer parental responses pertained to the last two themes of RESCUR, namely *Building on Strengths* and *Turning Challenges into Opportunities*. A clarification is necessary regarding reduced parental attention to these two themes. Due to scheduling problems or other practical issues (school breaks, other programs implemented at the same time or unforeseen organizational changes), some teachers missed their scheduled RESCUR weekly classes, as reported by them in the final RESCUR meeting. This may have resulted in less net classroom time for the last two themes of RESCUR, due to the fact that they were scheduled in the last months of the school year. Thus, less parental emphasis on these themes may have been to some extent a result of these circumstances.

Regarding RESCUR aspects which were helpful for their *child*, parents indicated the themes of "Developing communication skills" and "Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships". Many parents also reported positive changes in the child's behavior, as well as positive changes in the areas of growth mind-set and self-determination. The benefits parents reported from RESCUR for their *family* were focused on the skills they acquired themselves, such as better communicating with their child, better managing conflict in the family, achieving dialogue and cooperation, promoting active listening skills, forgiveness, and other interpersonal skills. It appears that RESCUR implementation at school had a cascading effect, through the additional use of homework RESCUR sheets and the interactions triggered by them, which further fostered healthy relationships in the family context.

With every improvement in interpersonal relationships, resilience is promoted; as Luthar has eloquently mentioned, "resilience rests, fundamentally, on relationships" (quoted in Weir, 2017, p. 40). In other words, it appears that the RESCUR program has functioned as a platform for the improvement of relationships between parents and children. Improved relationships can thus act as a positive influencing factor for parental wellbeing. The reduction of interpersonal conflicts in the family and school, which leads to improved relationships, has been documented to reduce children's stress and thus promote their resilience (Matsopoulos, Nastasi, Fragkiadaki, & Koutsopina, 2017).

The combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses of our qualitative data allowed for a more systematic overview and richer understanding of parental views on specific RESCUR subthemes. Looking at all data but mostly the qualitative data of parents' perceptions and views on how RESCUR was helpful, it can be argued that there is a connection between these findings and the overall theoretical framework of RESCUR. This framework conceptualized resilience as a *process* and as a *skill (or set of skills)* acquired after the implementation of the program in a school setting (Cefai et al., 2014). The data presented provide some initial support that resilience-promoting processes were activated via the homework sheet discussions and that weekly parent–child activities created a positive family climate fostering a healthier interpersonal environment. It may be assumed that through conversation, play, and healthier ways to relate to one another, a deeper bonding was promoted in the home environment. Moreover, the present study provides some preliminary support for the notion of promotion of resilience as a set of acquired skills, either for children or for parents. As reported by parents, at least in the three main subthemes of RESCUR (communication skills, self-determination skills, and healthy relationships skills) improvements have been observed both for the parents and for their children.

The findings of the current study support the importance of parental perceptions and views on the implementation of a resilience program such as RESCUR. Moreover, they further underscore that parental views are a significant variable to be studied in future implementation and evaluation studies of RESCUR or other resilience programs within the overall parental involvement framework. Our current findings about the significance of parental views are in the same direction with Wolfe's (2014) findings, in which parental voices were recorded and proved to be instrumental in understanding parents' perspective on the implementation of the UK Resilience program, thus further emphasizing parental involvement as a significant element of successful program implementation.

Our study of parental perceptions of the RESCUR implementation in Greek schools provides further support for the importance of parental involvement and its positive effects for student's acquisition of skills and promotion of mental health and resilience. Focusing on the overall concept of parental involvement, our study's findings concur with Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s findings (2009), where parental involvement was shown to increase successful outcomes for children in promoting resilience. In the present study, parental involvement at home, in the form of completion of RESCUR homework sheets and related parent–child activities, has been shown according to parental data

to contribute to the positive outcomes reported for both students and parents. This conclusion is in agreement with findings by Christenson and Havsy (2004) and Patrikakou and Weissberg (2007), who have documented that a key component for the success of SEL programs is parental involvement in delivering these programs. The above arguments further support RESCUR's overall theoretical framework (Cefai et al., 2014), in which the parental ecosystem along with the classroom and the school ecosystems play a central role in promoting resilience processes and skills.

The positive results of RESCUR reported by parents in the present study are in agreement with the study of Cefai et al. (2018), which reported positive changes for children in the early years when RESCUR was implemented in classrooms with teachers as informants concerning children's behavior. The most significant findings as reported by Maltese teachers were the increase in children's resilience skills, increased learning engagement, and improvement of prosocial skills. It is important to note, though, that in the Maltese study (Cefai et al., 2018) the main findings are positive changes in prosocial skills and resilience focused on children, while the present study focused on parental perceptions and parental attitudes about the implementation and efficacy of RESCUR on children.

Our study of parental views and evaluation of RESCUR program attests to the fact that parents have been supportive of increased home-school collaboration. In fact, parents reported a need for increased participation in the future implementation of RESCUR in schools. This is an opportunity for practitioners and schools to find ways to collaborate with parents, which will further benefit themselves and their families (Sheridan, Sluts, & Coutts, 2013). A proposal is for school psychologists and teachers to establish parental meetings in schools on a bi-monthly basis. Such meetings can provide information about the upcoming resilience activities of RESCUR, provide support and consultation to parents in helping them improve their positive communication and interactions with their child, and further build a sense of community and trust, which is important for the effective application of prevention programs (Ogden & Hagen, 2018).

School systems internationally need to reflect on how they fulfill this universal need of parents to be connected in a meaningful way with the school. There are many strategies available for cultivating a trusting relationship between the school and the family system. Implementing a structured resilience program is one of them (as in the case of the present study), but there are other avenues for this synergy to be promoted. In school systems where resilience programs are still unconventional, initiatives aiming to bring parents together and connect them meaningfully with the school culture and each other should be pursued, and emphasis should be given on building connections and authentic relationships (Luthar & Eisenberg, 2017).

## Limitations and future research

Even though the present study has some unique features and is the first investigation in Greece in terms of evaluating a new resilience program (RESCUR), it also has some limitations. One limitation of the study is that it was a small to medium-scale study within the Greek educational system. More research is needed in order to reach more secure conclusions about the effectiveness of RESCUR, including a larger number of school samples across the country, and combining parental data with teacher and student data.

In addition, the results of the present study are tentative. Circumstances of program implementation were not suitable for conducting a pre- and posttest research design study, which would allow for a further investigation of the fuller impact of RESCUR after implementation. The present findings of RESCUR's impact and effectiveness are only based on documented parental views and this should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. A proposal for the future implementation studies of RESCUR is to use more robust (pre- and post-) research designs, acknowledging that the present positive implementation results reported by parents are promising for the future and suggest that positive outcomes have been achieved due to RESCUR implementation.

Further implementation research is needed in the direction of combining parental evaluation data (but not only) from all six countries where RESCUR has been translated (e.g. Croatia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Sweden). Such research can lead to cross-cultural comparisons regarding children's resilience, the efficacy of RESCUR in different social-cultural conditions adopting the model of social ecology of resilience (Ungar, 2012). Finally, cross-cultural comparisons of potential positive effects of RESCUR program on parents' and teachers' wellbeing are also worth studying.

## Disclosure statement

There is no financial interest or benefit that has arisen from the direct application of the present research.

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