

Navigating divorce:

Empowering parents and children post-divorce in the Netherlands

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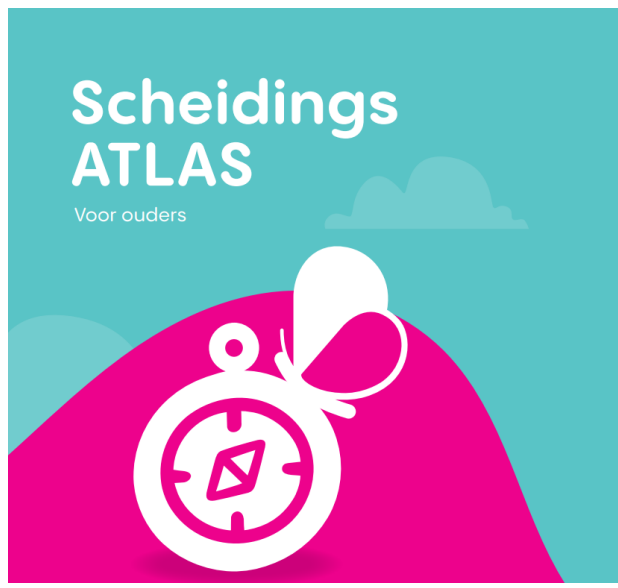
BACKGROUND

- Worldwide, parental divorce and separation rates are high.¹⁻⁴ (From here on 'divorce' refers to both separation and divorce.)
- Divorce is considered a negative life experience, posing significant risks to the wellbeing and functioning of both parents⁵⁻⁸ and their children^{9,10}, and often leading to a greater need for professional support^{11,12}.
- Mechanisms that mediate post-divorce adjustment – such as stress and support, bereavement, parenting after divorce, cooperation between parents, conflict management – offer leads for effective preventive support.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This poster sheds light on:

- how divorce is navigated in the Netherlands;
- three proven strategies to empower and support parents and children post-divorce:
(a) Tough Turtles, (b) Courageous Dinosaurs, and (c) Divorce ATLAS



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Questions:

- What are intervention results in effect studies?
- What are key elements of these proven strategies?
- What are challenges in post-divorce support; derived from application of strategies in Dutch practice?

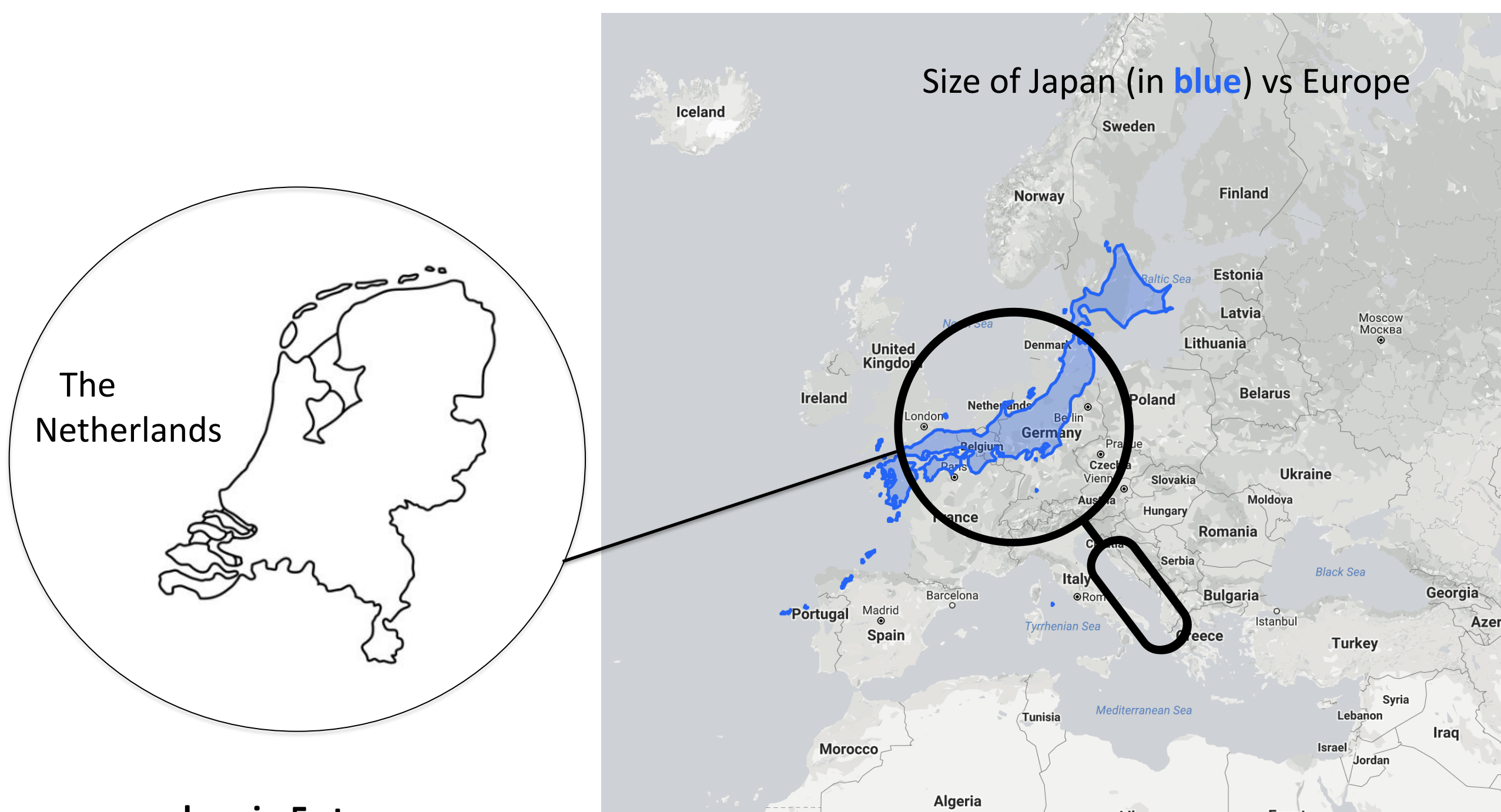
DIVORCE IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands in numbers (Source: CBS.nl)

Inhabitants (current)	18,1 million	(2025)
Marriages (yearly)	68 thousand couples + 23 thousand civil unions	(2023)
Divorces* (yearly)	24,310	(2023)
Divorce %	31,7	
Divorce and separation**	49.5 thousand parent-couples per year	(2019)
Children involved (yearly)	86 thousand minor children	(2019)

* These numbers do not include separation of civil and cohabiting partnerships, which are also numerous.

** Exact numbers (based on registration) are not available. This is an estimation.



Divorce procedure in 5 steps:

- Discuss divorce with spouse (and optionally mediator): write draft divorce agreement*.
- Submit divorce application to court (individually or jointly; mostly by lawyer).
- Assessment by court (optionally court session).
- Court decision (deed of resignation).
- Registration of divorce decree with the civil registry of municipality.

*Under Dutch law, parents who are married automatically have joint parental authority. This remains the case after divorce. Parental authority will be assigned to just one parent in exceptional cases only. If there are minor children, a 'parenting plan' is mandatory, with agreements about care, parenting and contact arrangements after divorce. There is no mandatory participation in support/educational programs.

METHODS

Tough Turtles and Courageous Dinosaurs

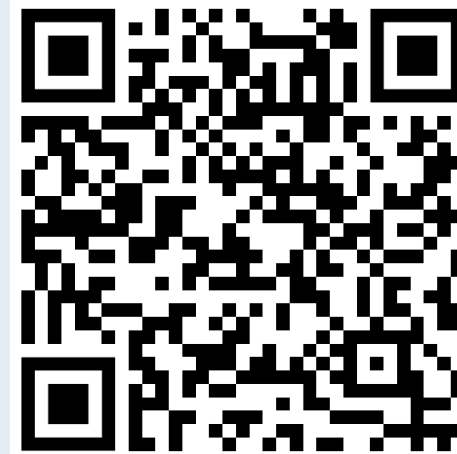
- Multiple pilot studies^{13,14}
- Intervention effects reported on this poster come from:
Quasi-experimental study (trial NTR 6788)¹⁵ comparing:
 - children participating in Courageous Dinosaurs ($n = 104$; intervention group I)
 - children with separated parents not participating ($n = 37$; divorced control group DC)
 - children from intact families ($n = 138$; non-divorced control group NDC)

Divorce ATLAS

- Quasi-experimental study (trial NTR 6582)¹⁶ comparing:
 - parents participating in Divorce ATLAS ($n = 187$; intervention group I)
 - parents on a waiting list for online support ($n = 111$; control group C)

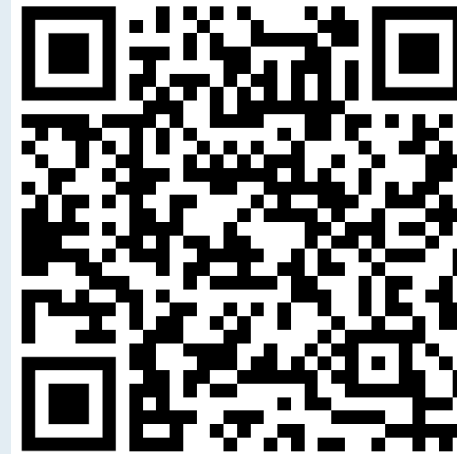
a) Tough Turtles

Groups of 4-6 children
aged 4-6 years



b) Courageous Dinosaurs

Groups of 4-7 children
aged 6-8 years



← Tough Turtles and Courageous Dinosaurs →
in EU best practices portal via QR-codes

- Recognized and awarded preventive, play-based, post-divorce group training, aimed at preventing divorce-related problems in **young children**;
- Translated and culturally adapted from US Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP)^{13, 17-19}
- 12 weekly 45-minutes group sessions, led by a qualified group leader and a co-leader
- Mode: many creative materials and games; central role for turtle/dinosaur hand puppet Sam/Rex
- Aims:
 - promoting accurate understanding of divorce-related concepts and clarifying misconceptions;
 - facilitating identification and appropriate expression of feelings;
 - enhancing problem solving skills;
 - enhancing perception of self and family;
 - creating supportive group environment.

c) Divorce ATLAS

Groups of up to 12 parents, with children in all ages

- Recognized and awarded educational program for **parents**.
- 2 3-hours group sessions, approximately 2-4 weeks apart, led by two qualified group leaders
- Derived from the US 'ACT for Children'; Assisting Children through Transition intervention²⁰
- Aim: informing and empowering parents after break-up
- Mode: offering psychoeducation on effective parenting, coping, communication skills.
- Goal: (ultimately) to strengthen parenting and the parenting context after divorce, in order to improve the opportunities for and well-being of children (Figure 1).

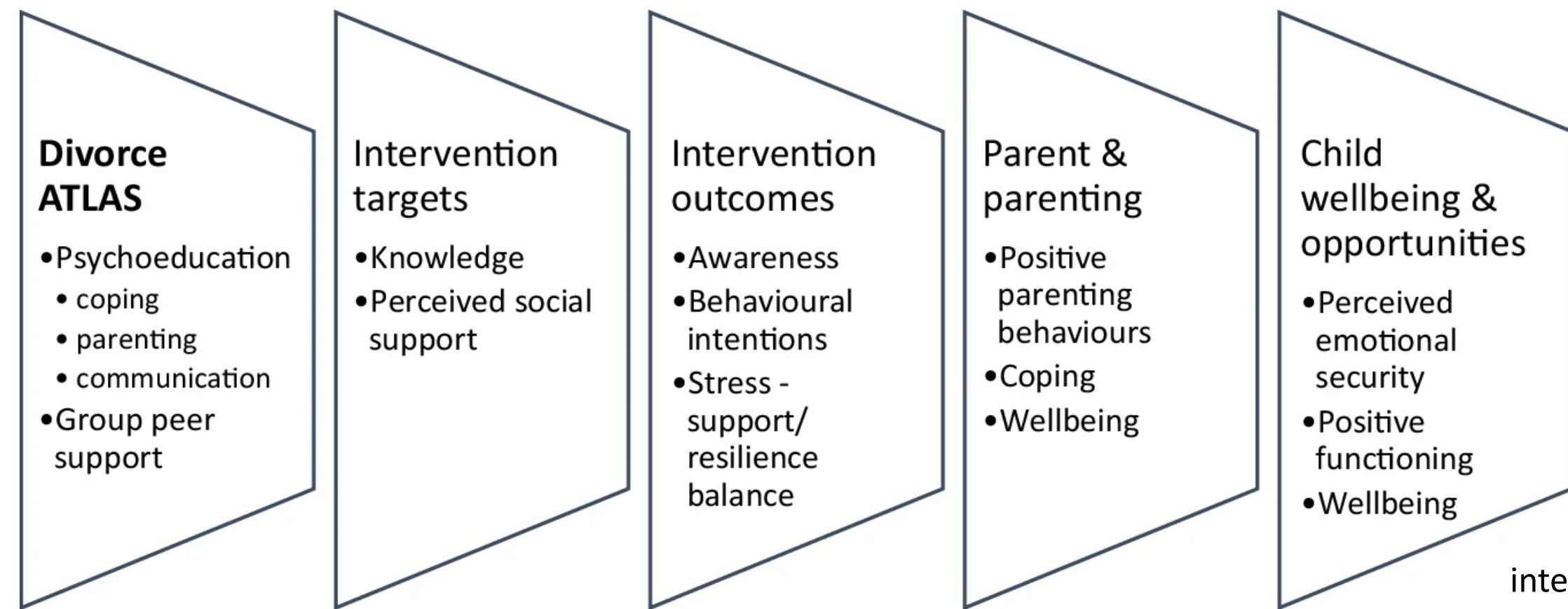


Figure 1.
Divorce ATLAS
intervention model¹⁶

INTERVENTION RESULTS

Tough Turtles and Courageous Dinosaurs:¹⁵

- Improved positive functioning
- Increased well-being
- Decreased emotional and behavioral problems

Cohen's $d = 0.97$ [I vs. DC]; $d = 1.04$ [I vs. NDC]
 $d = 1.00$ [I vs DC]; $d = 0.84$ [I vs NDC]; see Figure 2
 $d = 0.73$ [I vs DC]; $d = 0.49$ [I vs NDC]

Divorce ATLAS:¹⁶

- Improved perceived support
- Increased sense of parenting incompetence
- Increased child wellbeing (non-significant trend)
- Increased knowledge and impulse to act accordingly

Hedges' $g = 0.23$; see Figure 3
 $g = 0.19$
 $g = 0.18$

Figure 2. Child well-being pre/post Dinosaurs

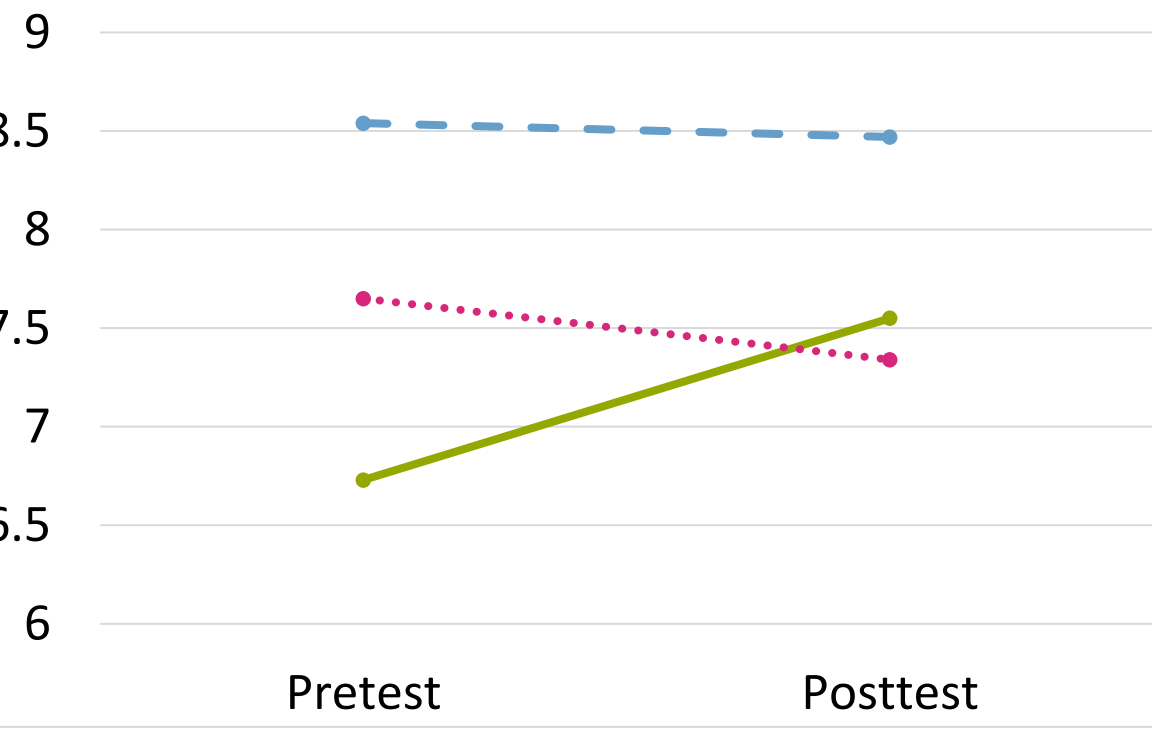
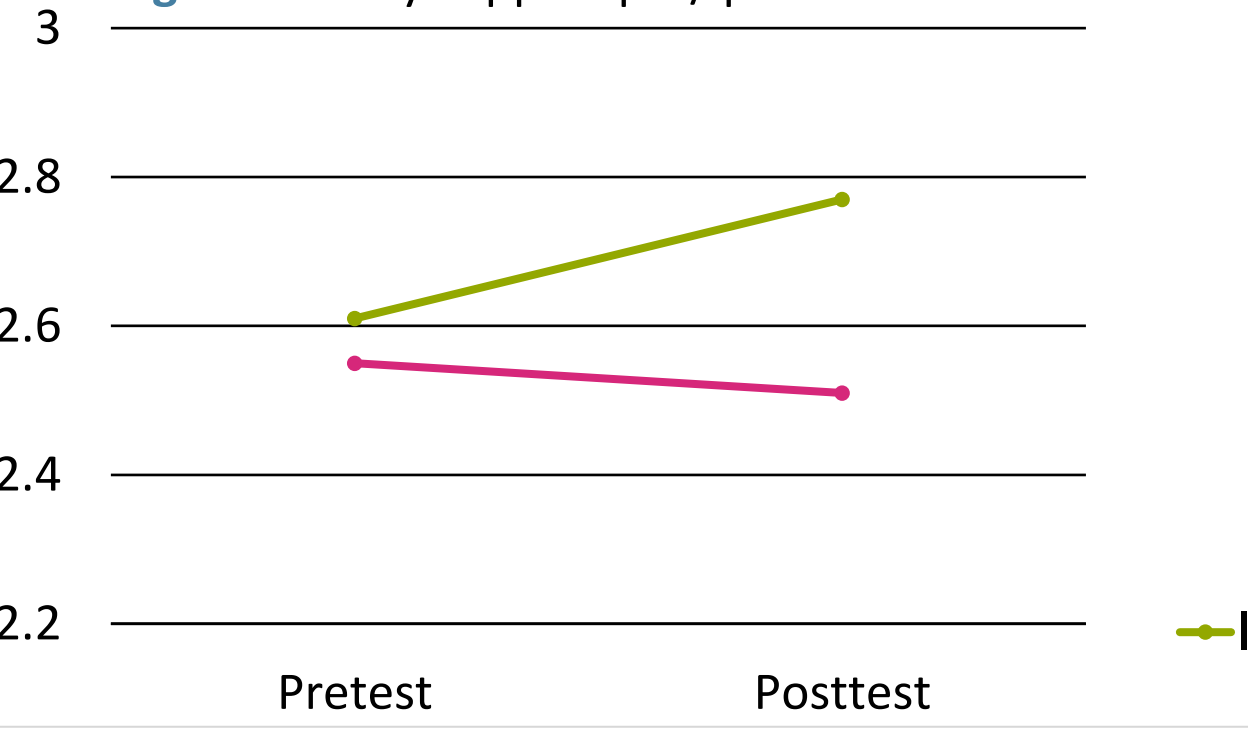


Figure 3. Daily support pre/ post Divorce ATLAS



[Self-reported well-being^{15,21}; 1-10, higher scores = more wellbeing] [Self-reported support¹⁶; 1-4, higher scores = more support]

KEY ELEMENTS

Tough Turtles and Courageous Dinosaurs

- Based on theories of play therapy, developmental psychology, stress and coping, resilience promotion, and research on risk & protective factors.
- Offering supportive group environment and skills training (emotion regulation, problem-solving).
- Structured program outline for group leaders.

Divorce ATLAS

- Based on theories of stress and coping, resilience promotion, research on risk & protective factors.
- Non-accusatory, normalizing approach
- Participation individually (without former spouse)
- Offering supportive group environment and psycho-education
- Structured program outline and accredited training for group leaders

CHALLENGES

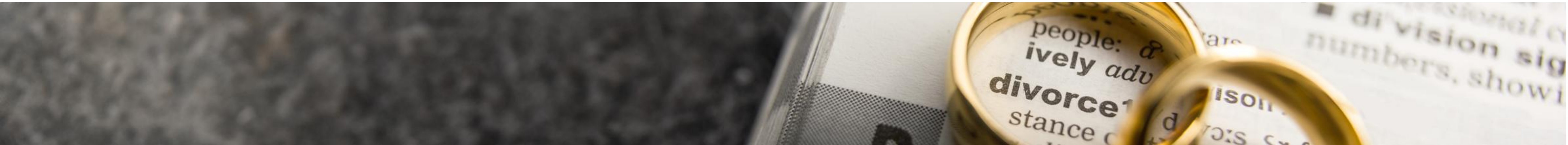
- Financing of preventive support post-divorce.
- Determining most suitable training settings in changing and locally set family care landscapes.
- Turnover of trained staff.

DISCUSSION

- High prevalence of parental divorce and potential impact call for preventive support for families.
- We found promising results based on internationally studied intervention models.
- Findings support wider implementation to educate, support and empower families post-divorce.

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