

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: Ca18211

STSM title: Perinatal mental health and birth trauma

STSM start and end date: 19/04/2021 to 03/05/2021

Grantee name: Katharina Hartmann

PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

The purpose of the STSM was to profit from the work and experience which the Croatian parents organisation "RODA – Parents in Action" has around the development, realization, implementation, and evaluation of parents' peer-to-peer educational online courses around childbirth, post-partum and breastfeeding. Given the good evaluation of the courses, and certain benefits of peer-to-peer courses (e.g. common experience, trust, "sharing is caring", tailor-made information, cfr. 1), we seek to adopt and translate the courses for the German speaking countries.

As peer communication is not as asymmetrical, prenatal preparations on a peer-to-peer level has certain advantages compared to professional instruction: Hearing from a peer what might be important, what to expect and what kind of decisions to consider might be a strong vehicle for self-empowerment and prevention (2).

Working through the three existing e-courses (childbirth, post-partum, and breastfeeding preparation) of approx. 2,5 to 3 hrs each of pure course material (texts, videos, gamelike interactive activities) and interviewing RODA's experts in e-learning, programming and project management as well as talking to the volunteers who made the short teaching videos, gave valuable insight into how to best transfer the course into German.

The STSM enabled us to now prepare a funding application.

(1) Abedini, Adam; Abedin, Babak; and Miliszewska, Iwona, "Peer to Peer Adult Learning Engagement in Online Collaborative Learning: Characteristics and Learning Outcomes" (2017). PACIS 2017 Proceedings. 181.

<http://aisel.aisnet.org/pacis2017/181>

(2) Herbert Backe , Christiane Lieb, "Peer Education" (*letzte Aktualisierung am 23.06.2015*), BZgA; doi:10.17623/BZGA:224-i088-1.0

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

I started my STSM with getting online access to the three online courses via the RODA homepage (cfr. <https://edukacija.roda.hr>) and, successively, took all of the three courses myself, while simultaneously preparing a first rough translation of the content. Since I don't speak Croatian, this was done with the help of online translation tools, which proved to work out even better than expected: I not only got a detailed understanding of the course content and its time management, but even though automatically translated, I was surprised how strongly the welcoming, warm atmosphere of the course was transmitted. RODA's aim was to create an atmosphere "like talking to a friend over a cup of tea".

I also worked through RODA's English online publication "Pregnant – Your friendly guide to the next 12 months" (3) as about 80% of the course content (and much more) comes from the book, as well as most of the graphics.

Questions throughout the STSM were clarified with Ms Drandic from RODA. We talked about visual inclusive identities, addressing the users and appropriate language registers, about legal issues (need of contract between the two associations, use of page templates programmed by RODA, rights to pictures, quotes, and graphics as well as data protection) and finances (prices of programming tools, plug-ins and add-ons, the role of volunteers vs. employed and paid project managers, ...). We also talked about results of the evaluation and the difficulty to reach special groups (refugees, men, ...).

During a second round working directly on the courses, I cleared the rough translation and set hyperlinks to existing National Guidelines ("Vaginal birth at term"(4) and "Cesarean section"(5)). In conferences with my Board I presented my current findings and we discussed priorities. More detailed questions on finances and possible grant applications were discussed. We also set the priority on courses 1 and 2, as they can be directly transferred, whereas the third course on breastfeeding seems to require additional work to adopt it for the German context and our target group.

On other days I conducted interviews with RODA volunteers, who shared their best practice with me: how to avoid certain mistakes and how to best coordinate the project (e.g. how to organize schedules for the general project and the individual workloads, which managing roles are helpful and necessary, what worked to lead a de-centralized team, etc.). They also gave tips for preparing and filming the video content. I also talked at length to RODA's e-learning expert and we discussed the special importance to present identical content in different formats and loop input, pros and cons of different formats of videos (talking directly to the camera vs. interviews vs. informal conversations between different presenters), the pros and cons of including games (because they don't work on all devices), time limits, certificates, a material hub, self-learning workbooks, and accompanying the e-course with community building formats like Facebook groups and live sessions, etc.

All this input was then included in my report to my organization. In the Mother Hood annual members' reunion on May 29th, 2021, the members' body has voted favorably on the implementation of the e-courses.

(3) downloadable here: <https://www.roda.hr/en/projects/3p-plus-education-for-a-positive-pregnancy-birth-and-postpartum/pregnant-your-friendly-guide-to-the-next-twelve-months.html>

(4) AWMF 015-083 <https://www.awmf.org/leitlinien/detail/II/015-083.html>

(5) AWMF 015-084 <https://www.awmf.org/leitlinien/detail/II/015-084.html>

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

The main result of the STSM is that courses 1 and 2 (on childbirth and post-partum period) can, as was our hope, be directly transferred into German, with only very minor adaptations needed to fit the German context. They offer a great opportunity to disseminate the first ever evidence-based national guidelines (on vaginal birth at term, published in January 2021 (3), and cesarean section, published in June 2020 (4) in a comprehensive way to women and families. This result is very positive regarding the amount of work needed in the future, but on the other hand it is rather astonishing that parents' organizations in countries as different as Croatia and Germany have identified so similar needs around preparing women and families to empower them around maternity care, enable them to get answers to their questions from care providers and, ultimately, get their needs met.

Both the general childbirth preparation course and the post-partum course have different strengths to them: Women already have a concept of childbirth education courses and they accept them – so e-course 1 might be easier to disseminate. The idea to look at the post-partum period and prepare for it is a new one to most women and families, although (from the experiences of both Mother Hood and RODA) the lack of knowledge about it causes problems to many families. Both organizations feel that knowing about issues like e.g. bleeding, pain, loneliness, physical and mental discomforts, the need to negotiate partner roles, and when and how to get help, if needed, could help to enhance well-being in the post-partum period substantially for many women.

So while course 1 might be easier to implement, it might also open up interest for course 2, which is felt to close a substantial gap and really make a difference in families' lives.

The third course on breastfeeding turned out to need much more work. Both its content and language are high-aiming, clearly addressed to women with above average education levels. Although it is useful as a draft to start from, it needs to be re-organized and re-framed.

While doing background research on information on breastfeeding available to women in Germany (and in German language) I was surprised of the lack of high quality, objectively informative, and evidence-based material available. Where it existed, it was difficult to find and although we have a National Breastfeeding Committee and the German Ministry of Food and Agriculture runs projects on raising breastfeeding rates in Germany, I was surprised to find that we still lack good national data collection and that, besides the breastfeeding support offered by midwives at their post-partum visits, most of the supporting work available to women seems at the hands of (unfunded) volunteer organizations.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

Several future collaborations have sprung from this STSM:

With RODA we will apply for grants, probably to the ERASMUS+ programme, to create courses for specific target groups (fathers; barrier free courses; implementing automated translation tools to enable different language versions; plain language courses). Also, Mother Hood will translate and non-commercially disseminate RODAs book "Pregnant - Your friendly guide to the next 12 months" (3).

In order to create online a peer-to-peer breastfeeding courses, Mother Hood will cooperate with the two major breastfeeding volunteer associations. We are also joining the National Round Table on Breastfeeding, hoping to promote the creation of more evidence-based material and make it easily accessible to women and families.

Report accepted by host on May 28th, 2021