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"The Body as a Parent's Resource" – A Pilot Study on the Impact of TRE® Practice in a School Environment

TRE® as Support for Parents' Mental Well-Being: Experiences from a Primary School Program

Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the results of a pilot **Tension & Trauma Releasing Exercises (TRE®)** program addressed to parents of primary school students, implemented in cooperation with a psychological and pedagogical counseling center.
The project involved seven parents who participated in six weekly group sessions. The program aimed to support emotional regulation, reduce tension, and enhance participants' psychophysical well-being through a self-regulatory practice.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative questionnaires with qualitative in-depth interviews. The results indicate significant improvements in sleep quality, overall well-being, patience in family relationships, and a general sense of inner calm. All participants (100%) expressed their intention to continue practicing TRE® after the completion of the program.

The findings suggest that TRE® may serve as an effective self-help tool supporting parents' mental health in educational settings. The article also highlights the importance of integrating body-based approaches into preventive initiatives undertaken by schools and counseling institutions.

Introduction

Stress as a Psychophysical Phenomenon in the Context of Parenting and Education

The author of this article is a certified TRE® Provider and a mother of three children of preschool and school age. For years, she has been closely observing the challenges inherent in parenting—particularly in light of the increasing educational, social, and emotional demands faced by today's caregivers. Her interest in nervous system regulation practices within the context of family life and education led to the development of a pilot program for parents of primary school students, aimed at exploring the impact of regular TRE® practice on their psychophysical well-being.

The impetus for launching the program came from observations of growing levels of tension, fatigue, and overload reported by parents in contact with the "Skrzydła (The Wings)" Non-Public Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Center in Lublin. It was there that the idea emerged to create a space where adults—who serve as the emotional foundation for their

children—could take care of their own resources and learn simple, body-based techniques supporting emotional regulation.

"From the perspective of my work in a psychological and pedagogical counseling center, I observe a growing emotional burden among parents of school-age children. The introduction of the TRE® method into the school environment appears to be a valuable and safe form of support. This neurophysiology-based method helps regulate tension and strengthen psychological resilience. Collaboration with a certified Provider—an active member of the school community—fosters trust among both parents and staff. The pilot program allows for the mindful introduction of this body-based approach as an element of mental health prevention."
— Anna Łagód, M.A., psychologist, psychotherapist, Director of the Skrzydła Non-Public Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Center in Lublin

Stress is a complex response of the organism to demands that exceed an individual's current resources. From a psychophysiological perspective, it encompasses both biological components (activation of the HPA axis, increased cortisol levels, muscle tension) and psychological components (a sense of overload, anxiety, irritability, and reduced emotional regulation capacity) [1]. In the context of contemporary family and school life, stress increasingly takes a chronic form, leading to exhaustion and burnout.

Parenting as an Emotional and Cognitive Challenge

Parenthood is one of the most significant life experiences and, at the same time, is often associated with intense emotional and cognitive strain. Parents of school-aged children face not only educational and upbringing challenges but also educational pressure**,** the need for constant emotional availability, time management demands, and numerous professional responsibilities.

Parental stress can affect not only the well-being of caregivers themselves but also the quality of relationships with their children, the emotional climate within the family, and even contribute to the emergence or intensification of stress symptoms in children.

The school environment, as the setting of children's daily functioning, also carries a high potential for stress. Interactions with teachers, the volume of schoolwork and extracurricular activities, performance pressure, and organizational or informational overload affect not only students but indirectly their parents as well.

A persistent state of tension within the family may lead to the phenomenon known as *"stress contagion"*—described in the literature as the co-experiencing and internalization of emotional tension among members of the family system.

In this context, methods that support the regulation of the autonomic nervous system and restore the natural capacity for psychophysical balance are gaining increasing importance [2][3]. One such method is TRE® (Tension & Trauma Releasing Exercises)—a body-based approach grounded in the neurophysiological mechanism of muscular tremors, designed to rebuild a sense of somatic safety and reduce deep-seated tension [4][5].

Research on the effectiveness of this method in the parenting context responds to the growing need for systemic, accessible interventions aimed at counteracting chronic stress within educational environments.

Literature Review

Scientific literature highlights the growing prevalence of psychological overload symptoms among parents of school-aged children. Studies indicate that chronic parental stress may lead to weakened self-regulation abilities, increased impulsivity, reduced empathy, and difficulties in establishing stable relationships with one's child [6]. Prolonged physiological activation resulting from exposure to family and environmental stressors negatively affects not only parents' mental well-being but also their physical health.

In response to these challenges, increasing attention has been directed toward somatic practices—approaches aimed at reducing muscular tension, enhancing body awareness, and supporting the regulation of the autonomic nervous system. The TRE® method (Tension & Trauma Releasing Exercises), developed by David Berceli in 1992, represents an integrative practice that combines bodywork and nervous system regulation to alleviate symptoms of stress, tension, and trauma. Numerous reports [7] suggest that somatic approaches complement cognitive-behavioral methods, particularly in the context of chronic stress.

In Poland, the TRE® method has been steadily gaining popularity; however, empirical research documenting its effectiveness in parenting contexts, especially within school environments, remains limited. There is therefore a clear need for pilot qualitative and quantitative studies that could serve as a foundation for broader exploration of this method's potential.

In the Polish academic and professional context, there is a growing interest in the TRE® method as a tool supporting stress reduction and the improvement of psychophysical well-being. Several bachelor's and master's theses have already been devoted to this topic. However, despite the availability of educational and popular materials, there is still a lack of published empirical studies examining the use of TRE® in the context of parenthood and the school environment in Poland.

Conclusions

Although the TRE® method is gaining popularity in Poland, there remains a clear research gap concerning its effectiveness, particularly among parents of school-aged children and within educational settings. The absence of published empirical studies in this area indicates the need for pilot research projects that could provide data on the effectiveness of TRE® in reducing stress and enhancing parents' functioning within the school environment.

To date, no published Polish research has specifically examined the use of TRE® as a method for supporting parental well-being in educational contexts. Yet, this group—often heavily burdened by family, professional, and relational demands—could particularly benefit from tools that promote psychophysical regulation and resilience.

The present study represents an attempt to address this research gap by providing preliminary empirical data on the effectiveness and reception of TRE® among parents connected to the school environment in Poland.

Research Aim

The aim of the present study is to evaluate the impact of a six-week cycle of TRE® sessions on the psychophysical functioning of parents whose children attend primary school. Specifically, the study seeks to capture changes in perceived stress levels, emotional comfort, body awareness, self-regulation capacity, and overall sense of well-being. The analysis is based on data collected through participant interviews conducted after each session and a final evaluation survey administered at the end of the program.

The choice of a mixed-methods approach stems from the need to capture both the subjective experiences of participants and the measurable self-reported changes in their functioning. This pilot study also serves as a foundation for further exploration of TRE® as a tool for supporting school communities—not only parents, but also teachers and professionals working within educational settings.

Methodology

Participants

The study involved 7 parents (6 women, 1 man) of children attending primary school. Participants were invited to participate in the pilot TRE® program through the Parents' Council and the School's Psychological-Pedagogical Advisory Board. Inclusion criteria consisted of willingness to regularly attend sessions and the desire to conduct self-observations during and after sessions.

The study had an exploratory-descriptive character and lasted six weeks. Participants took part in weekly group TRE® sessions led by a certified method provider (the author of this article). Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes and included:

a) a brief psychoeducational introduction,

b) a cycle of physical exercises stimulating neurogenic tremors,

c) time for integration and voluntary reflection.

Additionally, participants were asked to conduct systematic self-observations, focusing on their bodily sensations, emotions, mood changes, sleep quality, and reflections on family and work life functioning.

After completing the cycle, participants filled out a standardized questionnaire consisting of 10 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question, designed to evaluate the program's effects. This included questions using Likert scales (1–5) and one open-ended question. The questionnaire also contained questions about potential changes in physical, emotional, and social spheres. Topics included, among others, subjective feelings of calm, skills in managing stress, quality of contact with children, and overall well-being.

Qualitative responses from participants and the open-ended question were analyzed using thematic content analysis with induced thematic categories. The purpose of this analysis was

to capture recurring themes and individual reflections from participants regarding the impact of TRE® practice on their daily functioning.

The quantitative data from the questionnaire served as a reference point for assessing changes in perceived levels of stress, psycho-physical comfort, and family relationships.

Results

1. Evaluation Questionnaire Results

Analysis of the quantitative data revealed a clear trend in participants' psychophysical well-being after completing the six-week TRE® program. Responses to closed-ended questions (Likert scale 1–5) indicated that:

• 100% of participants were better able to recognize tension in their bodies,

• 100% developed the ability to calm themselves,

• 100% of participants noted an increase in body awareness,

• 85% of participants indicated a decrease in daily tension and anxiety,

• 85% of participants reported a stable and positive sense of inner peace,

• 85% of participants noted an increase in stress resistance,

• 100% of participants declared their willingness to continue practicing TRE® beyond the program's structure.

In the open-ended question, the most frequently mentioned words were: peace, body contact, relief, greater presence with children, and emotional awareness.

Parents who participated in the program described being surprised by the intensity, yet simplicity, of their bodies' reactions. Many of them emphasized that for the first time in a long time, they had a space “just for themselves” where they could feel what was truly happening inside them.

“After the third meeting, I realized that evenings with my children were no longer a battlefield for me. I began to react more calmly—not because I was forcing myself, but because I truly was calmer,” says one participant.

“I was surprised that my body started shaking on its own, and that it actually brought relief. I always thought I had to fight stress with willpower, and suddenly something else happened,” adds one mother.

These experiences were further explored in interviews, which included themes of increased emotional awareness, easier falling asleep, greater patience in relationships with children, and a feeling of “deep relaxation” previously unattainable even during vacation.

2. Analysis of Self-Observation Results

Qualitative data from participant reports allowed us to identify four main thematic categories:

a) Grounding in the Body and Reduction of Tension:
Participants described experiencing a “return to the body” and a noticeable decrease in physical symptoms of tension (e.g., neck stiffness, jaw clenching, back pain). Many emphasized that for the first time in a long time, they felt truly at rest. Participants agreed that using the TRE® method came easily to them and enjoyed continuing the practice at home.

b) Emotional Peace and Increased Accessibility to Children:
Weekly feedback revealed descriptions of calmer emotions, shorter reaction times to home stressors, and better emotional regulation with children. Parents reported greater gentleness toward themselves and their children.

c) Changes in the Quality of Family Relationships:
Respondents reported greater patience, a willingness to listen, and a reduction in family conflict. Some also reported improved relationships with their partners. d) Reflectiveness and Pattern Awareness:

Participants' responses suggest an increased awareness of the impact of their own emotional tension on the home environment and the identification of stress response patterns, often repeated unconsciously.

These results support the assumptions behind the TRE® method – that access to deep regulation of physical tension can lead to broadly understood improvements in emotional and relational functioning, including in the context of parenting.

Discussion

The significance of the results in the context of parental education and mental health

The study's findings have broad implications for both parents and educational communities, as well as for general considerations of mental health in the context of parenting. In the context of this group, given the particular strains associated with parenting while simultaneously managing other professional, social, and emotional commitments, the findings may have significant practical implications.

1. Improving parents' emotional balance

The study results indicate significant improvements in participants' self-assessment of stress management, perceived tension, and emotional balance. This improvement is crucial in the context of the parent's role, as they are not only responsible for raising children but also for maintaining emotional stability within the family. Chronic stress and the inability to effectively manage it can lead to burnout and negative consequences in family relationships. Therefore, implementing the TRE® method into parents' lives, especially in such a demanding environment as raising school-age children, becomes a tool for improving the overall quality of family life.

At the same time, the study highlights the importance of strengthening parents' emotional self-regulation skills, which in turn impacts their ability to be present and engaged in raising their children. Calmer, less stressed parents can better support their children, which is

particularly important for the child's emotional and social development. Such changes in parenting behavior can lead to more positive interactions with children, fostering their sense of security and emotional well-being.

2. Impact on the Quality of Family Relationships

From a mental health perspective, the results also indicate an improvement in the quality of family relationships. Reducing stress and tension among parents contributes to more harmonious interactions with children. Stress that is not properly regulated can escalate into frustration, emotional outbursts, or avoidance of contact with children. The TRE® method helps reduce physical and mental tension, which can lead to greater patience and empathy in parent-child relationships. Improving parents' mental health indirectly impacts their children's well-being, which is particularly important in the context of childhood – a period of intense emotional, cognitive, and social development.

3. Reducing Burnout

Parents who combine parenting with professional demands are at risk of high levels of burnout, which can result in reduced motivation, health problems, and decreased work performance. The TRE® method can be an effective tool in counteracting these negative effects, as it allows participants to effectively regulate stress and tension. Reducing burnout can translate into higher job satisfaction, improved concentration, and greater motivation for professional development. This, in turn, can improve self-perception in the professional role and, subsequently, improve relationships with colleagues.

4. Implications for the school community

Introducing TRE® in the family environment also has broad implications for the school community. Parents who use TRE® can play a more active role in school life, not only supporting their children's education but also engaging in initiatives that support the school's mental health. Improving parents' mental health can also strengthen collaboration with teachers and build an atmosphere of greater trust and openness in school-family relationships.

In the context of the school itself, parental mental health is often overlooked, while family involvement and support are key to creating a healthy, effective learning environment. TRE® practice can therefore become a tool for building a more cohesive community whose members are aware of their own emotions and needs and collaborate more effectively to ensure the well-being of their children. 5. Innovation and Potential for Further Development

The study results also suggest that TRE® can be an innovative tool in psychology and education. This is particularly important in the Polish context, where systemic solutions for supporting parental mental health are still lacking. Since methods such as TRE® can offer specific benefits in reducing stress, strengthening coping skills, and improving emotional well-being, they have the potential to be implemented in various educational contexts. Such a solution could therefore contribute to a shift in the approach to mental health in the education system, offering parents a tool they can use in their daily lives.

Study Limitations

Although the study results suggest the potential of TRE® to improve parental mental health, several significant limitations of this study should be noted. First, the study sample was

relatively small, limiting the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the lack of a control group means we cannot fully attribute the observed effects solely to the TRE® practice, as other variables, such as changes in participants' lifestyle, could also have influenced the results. Additionally, the self-report data collection method used in the study, although common in psychology, carries the risk of self-assessment bias. Participants may have subjectively assessed their feelings, which may introduce some distortion of the results.

Suggestions for Further Research

To deepen our understanding of the impact of TRE® on parents' mental health, we recommend conducting research with a larger sample size, which will allow for a more precise assessment of the method's effectiveness. It would also be advisable to include a control group, which would allow for a better determination of whether changes in participants' emotional state and stress levels are the result of TRE® practice or may be related to other factors.

The next step in TRE® research could be to analyze the long-term effects of this method, taking into account various social groups—for example, teachers or people working in high-stress professions. It would also be worthwhile to conduct research on the neurophysiological mechanisms behind TRE®'s effectiveness in reducing stress to better understand how this method affects the functioning of participants' nervous and emotional systems.

Conclusions

TRE® as a Tool for Supporting Parents' Emotional Functioning

The results of the study indicate that TRE® is an effective tool for reducing stress and improving parents' emotional balance. Program participants reported significant improvements in stress management, better response to daily challenges, and increased awareness of their emotional reactions. TRE® allowed them to better manage bodily tensions, which directly improved their overall well-being and quality of life. Participants' responses indicate an enhanced ability to respond better to stressful situations in both professional and family life, which is crucial for ensuring emotional stability in the family environment.

The Value of Introducing Bodywork Methods in the School Environment

Bodywork methods such as TRE®, embedded in the school context, can be extremely valuable for supporting the mental health of parents and teachers. Schools are important social environments that influence both the family and professional lives of citizens. Integrating programs such as TRE® into the school community provides an opportunity to build a culture of emotional support, reduce burnout, and improve the atmosphere in parent-teacher relationships. This, in turn, translates into improved functioning for children, who are an important part of this community. TRE®-based programs can support the creation of a more cohesive and stable community, where understanding the emotions and stress of others is paramount.

Potential for Broader Implementation in Prevention

The TRE® method demonstrates enormous potential for implementation in broader prevention programs, particularly in environments where stress and pressure are

commonplace, such as schools, emergency services, and social welfare institutions. Long-term studies on the effectiveness of this method may demonstrate its usefulness in reducing burnout, improving employees' quality of life, and developing healthy coping mechanisms. TRE®-based programs can be an important component of mental health prevention, providing participants with tools to better manage stress and emotions in their daily lives. Especially for parents who often struggle with balancing work, family, and parenting responsibilities, TRE® can provide an effective form of support, leading to reduced stress, improved quality of life, and enhanced mental resilience.

Summary

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Summary

TRE® has been shown to be effective as a tool for supporting parents' emotional functioning in the context of their family and professional lives. The study results suggest that this method can provide significant benefits in school programs, positively impacting parents' emotional well-being. Furthermore, there is significant potential for broader implementation of TRE® within preventive programs, particularly in the context of mental health and burnout prevention. Further research, including sample expansion and the use of a control group, will allow for an even more precise assessment of this method's effectiveness and enable its more systematic implementation in various social settings.

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