

# Social media as a force for families

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Social media and electronic gaming strategies can have an extremely positive influence on the lives of impoverished families, a study of The University of Queensland's Triple P Online program has found.

A version of Triple P Online, the web-based version of [UQ's Triple P – Positive Parenting Program](#), was ramped up with [social media](#) and gaming smarts and made available to disadvantaged families in Los Angeles.

Triple P founder Professor Matt Sanders said the enhanced version – called Triple P Online Community – was designed to encourage [parents](#)

to participate in the program and share knowledge about what they had learnt.

He said the study included 155 disadvantaged high-risk parents in Los Angeles.

"Of these, 76 per cent had a family annual income of less than \$US15,000, 41 per cent of parents had been incarcerated, 38 per cent were in drug and/or alcohol treatment and 24 per cent had a child removed due to maltreatment," Professor Sanders said.

The study, led by Dr Susan Love of California State University Northridge, set out to test if gaming and social media could successfully engage this traditionally hard-to-reach population, and show benefits to both parents and children.

"The program's 50 per cent retention rate of participants was extraordinary, given the stress the participating families would have been under just to manage daily life," Professor Sanders said.

"More importantly, both parents and their children showed improvements likely to lead to better developmental outcomes for those children and potentially more stability and less stress in the lives of the parents.

"Participation in evidence-based parenting programs has also been shown to reduce risk factors for child maltreatment.

"A program able to engage highly vulnerable families and produce outcomes such as these shows just how important it is that researchers think creatively when it comes to finding solutions for families."

Triple P Online Community was designed by Dr Love, former UQ-based

project manager Marianne Maurange and Triple P authors at UQ's Parenting and Family Support Centre, as well as researchers at the University of South Carolina and the Oregon Research Institute in the US.

Dr Love said one of the most rewarding aspects of the study was finding that parents in the Triple P Online Community actively encouraged each other.

"Parents in the study shared parenting tips and strategies, not just with each other, but with other family members, their friends, teachers and day care workers," Dr Love said.

"They also were far more engaged than the typical social media audience, far exceeding the 90-9-1 social media rule – the idea that 90 per cent of people watch but don't contribute to social media, nine per cent contribute occasionally and one per cent of users participate a lot.

"In our study, 50 per cent of our parents 'lurked' online, 32 per cent shared occasionally and 17 per cent shared frequently."

The study is online in the journal *Child Abuse and Neglect*.

**More information:** Susan M. Love et al. Social media and gamification: Engaging vulnerable parents in an online evidence-based parenting program, *Child Abuse & Neglect* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.10.031](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.10.031)

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