

PARENTAL PERCEPTION OF OPTIMISTIC VS. PESSIMISTIC PROGNOSTIC FRAMING IN THE NEONATAL ICU – A RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED CROSSOVER TRIAL (THE COPE-TRIAL)

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INTRODUCTION

Background: For parents in the neonatal ICU (NICU), prognostic information is key to set realistic expectations for their infant's future and to participate in shared decision-making. Parental perceptions of message framing in prognostic communication are insufficiently evaluated.

Objectives: To examine parents' prognostic framing preferences and effects of optimistic vs. pessimistic prognostic framing on parental perceptions.



MATERIAL & METHODS

Design: Single-centre, randomised, controlled crossover trial, conducted as an online survey (June - October 2021).

Setting & Participants: Non-bereaved, mentally healthy, German-speaking parents of former very low birth weight infants (VLBWIs) treated in the Division of Neonatology at the University Medical Centre Mainz (Mainz, Germany) between 2010 and 2019.

Interventions: Participants were randomised to view two standardised scripted video vignettes in alternating sequence. Both video vignettes depicted the same NICU physician communicating the diagnosis and associated prognosis of an intraventricular haemorrhage (IVH) in a VLBWI to its parents. Identical outcome estimates were, however, reported as either chance of survival and probability of good health (optimistic framing) or risk of death and impaired survival (pessimistic framing).

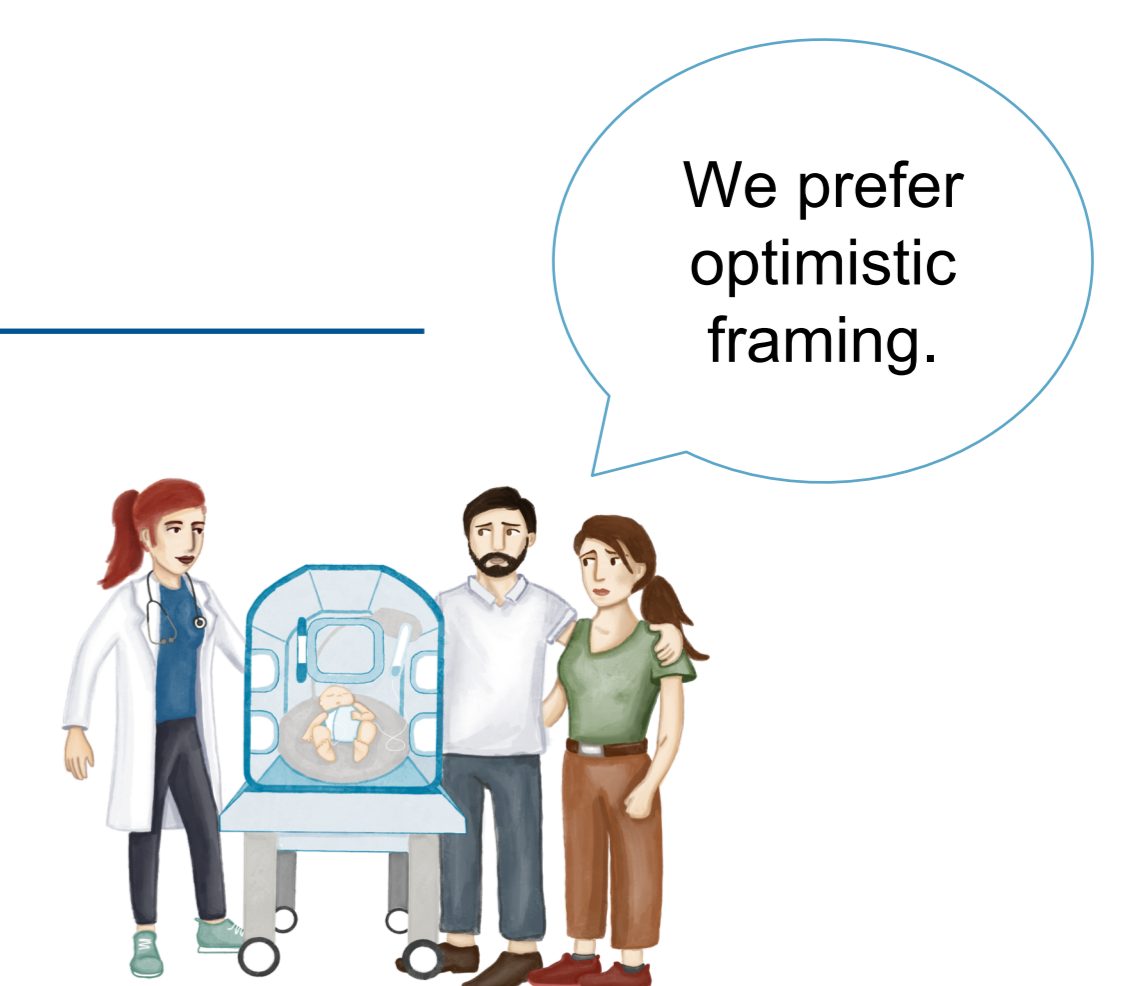
Outcomes: Primary outcome was the participants' preference for optimistic vs. pessimistic prognostic framing. Secondary outcomes included framing effects on parental perceptions.

RESULTS

Primary outcome: Participants (N=220) preferred optimistic to pessimistic framing (89.1% vs. 10.9%; preference odds [95% CI]: 11.0 [6.28-19.1]; P<.0001).

Secondary outcomes: With optimistic compared to pessimistic prognostic framing...

- participants rated the physician as more professional (P<.001) and compassionate (P<.001);
- participants felt better informed about the prognosis (P<.001) and they perceived it as less unfavourable (P<.001);
- numerical estimates for survival, but not for impairment, were more accurately recalled (P=.002 and P=.161);
- participants' prognostic expectations were more optimistic (P<.001) and more hopeful (P<.001).



CONCLUSION

Parents clearly preferred optimistic prognostic framing.

Optimistic prognostic framing may result in a realistic expectation of survival, but not of impairment.

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