Does Working Longer Hours Affect Parental Involvement with Their Child?

Taylor Anne Freeberg

Longwood University

Abstract

Head Start parents tend to work longer hours in order to provide for their children, as they are from a low-income background. For parents like this, it is difficult to find time to be involved. The purpose of this study was to see if parent involvement increased with activities given while recognizing a negative influence on the child's academic success while their parents worked lengthy hours while measuring parent involvement. Themes of togetherness, family, and learning were apparent after compiling that data, which also revealed that 2.7% of participants worked less than ten hours in a week, and the remaining 97.3% worked well above that. Previous research divulges the importance of at-home parent involvement (Deplanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007) as well as how children with low levels of parental pre-academic stimulation may lack sufficient support at home (Miller, Farkas, Vandell, & Duncan, 2014). Findings from the current study indicate that while Head Start parents are required to volunteer, it is important for all families to be involved. Parental involvement increases the likelihood of their child obtaining higher education. I will recommend for the increase of parent involvement in the program and educate themselves for the betterment of their children.

*Keywords*: Head Start, parent involvement, long hours, children, academic success

Do parents that work longer hours negatively affect their child’s academic success?

Being a parent in today's society is no simple task. A famous quote says, "it takes a village to raise a child," so people often take that mantra to heart and offer criticisms on what is best. Parents face so much scrutiny when it comes to how much time is spent with their child/children, disciplining them, and the example parents choose to set. Noting the effect that parents have on their children, data has since revealed the "importance of parental relationships in engaging youths in developing a vision for a meaningful future toward the goal of academic achievement," (Hill, Liang, Price, Polk, Perella & Savitz-Romer, 2018). Parents must instill in their children the desire to have life goals, aspirations, and a good work ethic.

There are influencing factors that impact a parent's ability to be involved in school as well as at-home activities, parent cliques, parent's education, attitudes of school staff, family issues, and financial stability/instability (Pena, 2000). According to Schaub, parental involvement has significant benefits for school-aged children (Schaub, 2004) so, I wanted to explore the opposite; I wanted to see if a child's academic success was negatively affected by their parents working longer hours, thus, being less present. This is not to say that these parents are unfit or do not care about their children. However, since this study focuses on families of the Head Start Program, these parents must work harder to provide, so it is worth mentioning the many factors that may inhibit their ability to be as available as they would like.

Two of the most critical factors of parent involvement is financial stability along with socioeconomic status. Brown and Beckett conducted a study that compared academic achievement and parental involvement among middle-class families and disadvantaged families. Building off the initial premise that other factors affect a parent's ability to be present, this study agreed, and added that parents who are at the poverty line are less present at school events, such as, PTA meetings, student conferences, and school fundraiser events and those who fell into the middle class were much more present (Beckett & Brown, 2007). The participants that were part of the low income population revealed that not only did the child feel a lack of support from teachers, but that the parents themselves felt threatened by their inability to be in attendance that they felt intimidated to reach out for help, thus penalizing the student (Beckett & Brown, 2007). Whereas, families that are considered middle class, believed that teachers were extremely hands-on while praising the involvement of parents. These disparities contribute to middle-class families having the ability to ask for help, having financial support, and additionally having higher education compared to the low-income families (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). This ties in with my initial idea that children of those who work longer hours, will be negatively affected.

 While attempting to measure parent involvement by seeing how well the participants scored on the activities, a mixed-method study was used. Mixed methods research combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for in-depth understanding and corroboration (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The goal of this design, of combining qualitative and quantitative findings, strengthen the conclusion of the study, and contributing to other literature (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

**Literature Review**

The Head Start program is run by the Department of Health and Human Services for low-income families, where children receive an education, and parent involvement is promoted, and high levels of opportunity are achieved (Hindman & Morrisson, 2011). Hindman and Morrisson's study examined the nature and extent of family involvement and wanted to see how the parent's role help develop literacy-related skills. Since parents are the first teacher to the child, the parent must be involved in the beginning stages, which is why Head Start promotes the learning of vocabulary, decoding skills, and positive approaches (McWayne, Zigler, & Valentine, 2008). Overall, the study found that by far, the most crucial aspect when it came to academic achievement started in the home and was strengthened there as well (Hindman & Morrisson, 2011).

It is important to note that parent involvement has been defined as "parents' interaction with schools and with their children to benefit their children's educational success," (Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004) therefore, parent involvement in students' learning is an imperative aspect of a child's education and is related to their academic performance and engagement (Oswald, Zaidi, Cheatham, & Brody, 2017). The study conducted by the authors mentioned above, attempt to address the participation of parents in school activities, home activities, learning activities in the community, and helping with homework. However, there were certain factors in family characteristics that played a significant role. The characteristics that affect involvement are as follows: financial stability, parents' educational attainment, parents' mental health, secure housing, healthcare, and access to nutritious foods (Oswald et., al., 2017).

These studies strengthen the fact that parent involvement is vital concerning a child's success and well-being. While I hypothesized that with parents working longer hours, their child would be negatively affected, it is supported, not only by my research but others as well.

**Data and Methods**

**Study Design and Sample**

The study was conducted to measure how involved parents are with their children aged 3-5 enrolled in Head Start. Head Start is a Federal program for children and families who are from a lower socioeconomic status and considered low income. Head Start enhances cognitive, social, and emotional development, which is why the activities chosen encouraged the children to think outside of the box and enjoy time with their parents. This study included 86 families, who had a child or children ages 3-5 in Head Start, in the Southern United States, which spanned over three rural counties. With having qualitative as well as quantitative responses, mixed methods were used. With evaluation research, combining the two is most effective. The response rate was 52%.

**Procedure**

All human subject’s protection were adhered to as stipulated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Longwood University. The participants of the study were given pen and paper, which was sent home with the children, and at the top of the survey, the parents provided their signature, which was their consent. All 86 surveys that were sent home with the children had a $5 superstore gift card attached, as an incentive towards increasing the response rate. With having to answer 50 questions, four being open-ended, and the remaining 46 closed-ended, it should have taken roughly 30 minutes to complete. After allowing the children to bring the surveys back on their own, an email was sent to the families by their teachers as a reminder.

**Quantitative Measure**

On the survey, some questions, such as: “on a scale of 0-10, how much did your family enjoy this activity?” were based on a zero to ten scale, with zero meaning not at all and ten meaning very much. From the following choices, please choose the most appropriate level of completion for this activity with the choices: attempted and completed, attempted but did not complete, and did not complete. It was asked the duration of the activity; how long did it take you and your child/children to complete the activity? Involvement was also measured by asking “how involved was your family in this activity, with zero meaning not at all and ten meaning very much.

**Qualitative Measures**

Four open-ended questions were placed at the beginning of the survey, and the questions are as follows: "What was your favorite activity and why? Please explain what your family gained from these activities. How will you use what you gained in the future? Do you think that being provided with pre-planned activities increased the amount of fun time you got to spend with your family after school? Please explain. If you had to change at least one thing about these activities for future use, what would it be?" These questions allowed the families to provide a better understanding of how the families felt about the activities and the impact it had on the quality time shared.

**Analysis**

**Quantitative Responses**

Descriptive analyses were conducted by the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 25.

**Qualitative Responses**

Once the surveys were returned, all the responses are put into a word document and organized by question. The responses were coded into qualitative coding based on themes.

**Mixed-Method Analysis**

Mixed-method analysis is where the quantitative and qualitative data either confirmed, contrasted or enhanced one another. Mixed methods are used to inform one another.

Findings

**Quantitative:**

While trying to see if there was a negative influence on children while their parents work long hours, it was essential to analyze the completion of the activities and the progress of the child. On the surveys when the participants starts a new activity, the first question asks, “from the following choices, please choose the most appropriate level of completion for this activity,” and the choices are: attempted and completed, attempted but did not complete, and did not attempt. The overall findings for this question revealed that the most given response was attempted, which had a mean of 6.18. On average, participants responded with 1.15. See Table 1 for results.

My initial hypothesis was that parents who worked long hours in a week, would play a negative influence on the children, so hours worked in a typical week and completion of the activity was evaluated. Overall, 2.7% of participants worked less than forty hours in a week, and the remaining 97.3% worked forty plus hours a week. Hours worked was the first component looked at, the data revealed that the minimum number of hours worked by parents were zero hours; whereas, the maximum number of hours worked was 56; thus, the mean hours worked per household was 31.29 hours. Then, it was essential to look at completion of activities, in order to determine if it was in line with the initial hypothesis.

In order to see if there was a negative influence dependent on the hours worked by the parents, it was necessary to understand how the completion of the activity corresponded to the hours worked. For the participants that completed the activities, the mean was 6.18, attempted but did not complete was 3.83, and did not attempt received a mean of 5.00. This shows that 87.9% of participants were able to complete the activity even though 97.3% of participants reported working forty plus hours a week. See Figure 1 for results.

 **Qualitative:**

This study examined the involvement that parents had with their children, who were enrolled in Head Start. For five days, five "Family Fun Time Activities" were sent home with the children, and on the last day, a survey was given. After analyzing the first round of data collection, 19 of 86 surveys were completed and returned. The four themes that emerged, which will be discussed are fun, togetherness, family, and learning. With the objective of the study being to measure parent involvement, these themes are in line with the intent.

Although each survey does vary, one overarching theme that was extremely apparent was fun. When the survey asked for feedback on the children's favorite activity, the favorite was the Animal Dice Activity, which was closely followed by the Stress Ball Balloon Activity. Respondent 2 mentions how the "box game [was] fun for [the] whole family," and Respondent 13 continues to say that "my son was happy, and it was fun." One important question, was "do you think that being provided with pre-planned activities increased the amount of fun time you got to spend with your family after school?" to which Respondent 5 replied, "it was fun and looked forward to it" which was the hope for this study.

Togetherness is another prominent concept that was found in the survey responses. The data revealed that much of the families were able to spend [more] time together and how it engaged the entire family; thus, "we had fun learning together," reported Respondent 9. While the aspiration was to get parents more involved, it is gratifying that it not only encouraged parents but the entire family to associate with one another.

Undoubtedly, the family was yet another motif that protruded while interpreting the data. Respondent 5 expressed how "our family was able to bond," which is excellent. Not only did the activities bring the parents as well as the children closer, but it was also beneficial for the entire family. Respondent 5 is not alone in this feeling of togetherness, another survey, completed by Respondent 7, was similar in that they "enjoyed sitting down together doing the activity as [a] family." Families are all different, so definitions of "family time" may differ depending on the household, so for each family to agree that these activities increased their "family time" is rewarding.

Lastly, learning was the final theme. The activities that were given held educational value meantime, being fun, and promoting family togetherness. The second question of the survey states, "Please explain what your family gained from these activities. How will you use what you gained in the future?" One of the responses, given by Respondent 12, said, "Mommy and me time. With education and creative projects, my daughter had a time of laughs and learning," embodies the entity of the study. In another question, "Please explain what your family gained from these activities," Respondent 4 mentions how "she learn[ed] to take turns," so not only are they learning about animals, emotions, and spelling, the children were able to learn other valuable lessons.

While there are a plethora of commonalities, there were differences as well. For example, the final question prompts respondents to explain ways of improving the activities in the future, the most common response was "nothing," "none," and "n/a." But, some respondents had other ideas. The majority believe that there were no problems, but Respondent 5 points out "[to] be mindful that kids [her sons age] like to put items in [their] mouth." Another tip given by Respondent 6 was, "I would like more activities about learning to write and how to hold a pencil," which is something to keep in mind while moving forward with this study.

Conclusion

Parent involvement continues to be at the forefront of adolescent’s academic success. Low income families are at a disadvantage when it comes to educational achievement, due to an increasing demand for their parents at work rather than at home. While I did find that parents who worked longer hours did negatively affect the child's academic affluence, it is not the only defining factor of that child.

To summarize findings from previous studies, in order for a child to attain the best education, it begins inside of the home. Parents beliefs and ideologies about education stem from their own personal experiences with school, learning, and parenting, which they project onto their child. A study that measures parenting practices and academic success mentions how families from low-income backgrounds hoped their children would be academically successful, but they felt ill equipped to facilitate this process (Mayo & Siraj, 2015).

Improvements to Head Start parents in order to gain involvement in their child’s well-being would be better communication with school faculty, encouraging higher education for parents, and better time management between work and family. Additionally, if I were to conduct this study again in the future, I would give a pretest as well as post-test to get a true measurement for the child's academic success.

References

Ansari, A., & Gershoff, E. (2016). Parenting involvement in Head Start and children’s development: indirect effects through parenting. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 78* (12), 562-579.

American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication manual of the American psychological association.* New York, NY: American Psychological Association.

Beckett, K., & Brown, L. (2007). Parent involvement: support or partnership? *Counterpoints, 309,* 51-65.

Deplanty, J., & Coulter-Kern, R., & Duchane, K. (2007). Perceptions of parent involvement in academic achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research, 100,* 361-368.

Hill, N. E., Castellino, D. R., Lansford, J. E., Nowlin, P., Dodge, K. A., Bates, J. E., & Pettit, G. S. (2004). Parent academic involvement as related to school behavior, achievement, and aspira- tions: Demographic variations across adolescence. Child Development, 75, 1491–1509.

Hill, N., & Liang, B., Price, M., & Polk, W., & Perella, J., & Savitz-Romer, M. (2018). Envisioning a meaningful future and academic engagement: the role of parenting practices and school-based relationships. *Psychology in the Schools, 8,* 595-608.

Hindman, A., & Morrison, F. (2011). Family Involvement and Educator Outreach In Head Start. *The University of Chicago Press, 111* (3), 359-386.

Mayo, A., & Siraj, I. (2015). Parenting practices and children’s academic success in low-SES families. *Oxford Review of Education, 41* (1), 47-63.

Miller, E., & Farkas, G., & Vandell, D., & Duncan, G. (2014). Do the effects of head start vary by parental preacademic stimulation? *Child Development, 85,* 1385-1400.

Oswald, D., & Zaidi, H., & Cheatham, D., & Brody, K. (2017). Correlates of parent involvement in students’ learning: examination of a national data set. *Journal of Child & Family Studies, 27,* 316-323.

Pena, D. (2000). Parent involvement: influencing factors and implications. *Journal of Educational Research, 94,* 42-54.

Schaub, M. (2004). Parenting cognitive development from 1950 to 2000: the institutional effects. *American Sociological Association, 1,* 1-45.

Schoonenboom, J., & Johnson, R. (2017). How to construct a mixed methods research design. *Sociology Today, 69,* 107-131.

Table 1

*Children’s performance level based on parental presence*

Descriptive Statistics

Measure *n M (SD) Median Mode 95% CI*

Attempted 29 6.18 (2.47) 6.00 1.00 [ 1.00, 10.00 ]

and Completed

Attempted but 3 3.83 (0.29) 4.00 1.00 [ 3.5, 4.0 ]

did not complete

Did not attempted 1 5.00 (1.0) 5.00 1.00 [ 5.00 ]

Hours worked in 34 5.985 (2.40) 6.00 6.00 [ 1.00, 10.00 ]

a typical week

*Note.* We gave Head Start family’s activities that help develop literacy-related skills and promote family involvement, specifically the Sugar Tray Writing activity in which children needed to identify shapes, numbers, and letters within their name. We also observed the number of hours worked weekly. The table above shows descriptive characteristics on the performance level once given the activities, in which we believed could be influenced by the number of hours worked by the parent, causing them to be present or absent.

*Figure 1.* The graph above represents the completion of the Sugar Tray Activity, in which the participants were asked to spell their names, identify shapes, and identify numbers. Majority of participants were able to complete all activities, but there was a significantly larger portion of those who did not attempt it than those who did.