

**The Effects of Family Fun Time Activities on Parent Involvement and Single Parent
Households**

Ashley Carson

Longwood University

Sociology 345: Social Research and Program Evaluation

Dr. JoEllen Pederson

November 22, 2023

Abstract

In this study, the levels of parent involvement for children who are living in single parent households present the need for research. The purpose of this study is to analyze the effects of family fun time activities on parent involvement, and to further research differences in demographics. The research will take place at Head Start, a federally subsidized preschool for families with economic need. Children will be sent home with a family fun time activity, followed by a survey to be completed after the activity. Data will be collected on demographic and involvement based survey responses, as a mixed methods study. Qualitative data will be described as inductive open coding used to determine recurring themes in the respondents' responses on open-ended questions. Quantitative data will be described as descriptive statistics on close-ended questions. Family fun time activities presented four common themes: bonding, learning, motivation, and time.

The Effects of Family Fun Time Activities on Parent Involvement and Single Parent Households

Family fun time activities present the opportunity to increase the levels of family involvement for children attending Head Start, a federally subsidized preschool for families with economic need. This is important because levels of family involvement contribute to children's success, where a lack of involvement can hinder test scores, behavior, and more (Tautolo, et al., 2015).

Research has addressed multiple contributing factors to a lack of family involvement. According to Fantuzzo (2004), family involvement and early childhood education was centered around the idea of focusing on relationships between parents and teachers. Following Fantuzzo's conclusions, Epstein (2010) produced Epstein's framework, which also discussed involvement focusing on communication between parents and educators. Specifically, research also shows that a lack of father involvement causes behavioral issues within young children, where aggression can take place as a form of gender based social behavior (Torres, et al., 2015; Tautolo, et al., 2015). In addition to parent and teacher communication, and behavioral issues due to a lack of father involvement, socioeconomic factors have been proven to affect family involvement as well, sharing a relationship with the higher likelihood that lower income families are single parent homes or lack a father figure (Fantuzzo, et al., 2004; Lee, K., & Markey, J. 2021; Zalewski, et al., 2012).

These studies conclude the specific connection a lack of father figure or low socioeconomic status has to low amounts of family involvement, but fail to strictly address single parent homes regardless of the parent's gender, which presents the reasoning behind this study. This research on single parent households and their levels of family involvement is

significant for early education teachers as well as doctors and scientists. The purpose of this study is to support the hypothesis that if Family fun time activities are completed, then family involvement will increase. Previous studies have shown that parent involvement relates to single parent households (Zalewski, et al., 2012).

Literature Review

Head Start is a national child development program that provides childcare and academic services for low income families. This is an opportunity for individuals of low economic status to provide academic and social opportunities for children through preschool, starting at birth, until five years of age. Lower class or working class families typically have less opportunities for family involvement, and are more likely to be divorced, or single parent families as well (Zalewski, et al., 2012). If we increase family involvement through parent to child activities, studies show this increase could affect children positively through Head Start.

Epstein's (2010) framework on types of involvement suggested six different ideas: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. In addition to Epstein's (2010) framework on involvement focusing on communication between parents and educators, Ismail's (2019) article on parental communication with educators, as well as Fantuzzo's (2004) article on family involvement and early childhood education, also resonate with the idea of focusing on relationships between parents and teachers.

There are multiple types of family involvement around education promoting child success, and many researchers have studied the factors that hinder these young children's success and abilities. Factors such as parental drug/alcohol use, family violence, socioeconomic status, single parent homes, and lack of father involvement are all common examples along with

adverse childhood experiences that can hinder test scores, behavior, and more (Lee, K., & Markey, 2021; Zalewski, et al., 2012; Tautolo, et al., 2015; Torres, et al., 2015; Ismail, et al., 2019; Fantuzzo, et al., 2004; Adler-Baeder, et al., 2016). In 2021, Lee, K., & Markey, noted that research has shown how enrollment and participation with Head Start increases cognitive test scores and socio-emotional scores, however the Head Start impact depends on the amount of adverse childhood experiences.

Low income preschool children are more likely to be apart of families who are co parenting, or single parent homes where a lack of family involvement or specific parent causes bad behavior, aggression, and a lack of educational success (Adler-Baeder, et al., 2016; Tautolo, et al., 2015; Torres, et al., 2015; Zalewski, et al., 2012). Specifically, research also shows that a lack of father involvement causes the emotional and behavioral issues within young children, where aggression can take place as a form of gender based social behavior (Torres, et al., 2015; Tautolo, et al., 2015). Socioeconomic factors have been proven to affect family involvement as well, which correlates with the higher likelihood that lower income families are single parent homes or without a father (Fantuzzo, et al., 2004; Lee, K., & Markey, J. 2021; Zalewski, et al., 2012).

Family involvement and the effects of low income preschool children revolve around multiple factors. Poor communication between educators and parents, single parent homes, lack of a father figure, and more contribute to setbacks in children's educational and behavioral outcomes, where family and educational involvement have been proven to promote success within young preschool children enrolled in Head Start.

Data and Methodology

Instrument

A survey questionnaire was created by eight members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation Team at Longwood University. The survey consisted of 15 questions, 12 close-ended questions and three open-ended questions. The first question on the survey asked respondents for informed consent. Any respondents who answered “no” to the informed consent were not able to see any other questions. The survey included questions that measured family involvement, family enjoyment, evaluation of SMART objectives, and demographics. The survey was sent online through Qualtrics. Head Start teachers emailed links of the survey to guardians, and children brought home books with a QR code attached.

Sample

The non-probability sample for this study was based on 17 children (ages three to five) who attend Head Start in rural Virginia. Head Start is a federally subsidized preschool for families with economic need. Family Fun Time activities were sent home with children, to encourage family involvement with children. The haunted runway activity was a fashion show, where children were directed to create three or more costumes out of items found in the home. This was to encourage family involvement as well as creativity for low-cost Halloween costume ideas. This activity was also used to display the child’s ability to follow directions and clean up after themselves afterwards. With the Family Fun Time activity, a children's book with an attached QR code was sent encouraging families to take the online survey after they completed the activity. Teachers sent a reminder email to parents to complete any outstanding surveys. This resulted in four questionnaires being completed. Overall, there was a 4% response rate. Therefore, data from previous years (2019 and 2022) on Family Fun Time activities were added to the analysis. This resulted in 66 completed surveys to be used in analysis (four from 2023, 20 from 2022, and 42 from 2019).

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis of completed surveys was based on the close-ended questions. For this study, the dependent variable is family involvement. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was, “on a scale from 0 to 10, how much did this activity encourage your family to work together?” (0=not at all, 10=a great amount). The independent variable for this study is single parent households. This is operationalized using the item, “Does your child live in a single parent household?”. Answer choices for this item are “Yes”, “No”, or “Prefer not to answer”. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze these variables.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the completed surveys (from 2019, 2022, and 2023) was based on open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were, “What did you enjoy about this activity?”, “What are your suggestions for improving this activity?”, and “Typically, what activity do you do with your child?”. To answer the research question, “Do family fun time activities affect family involvement?”, inductive open coding was used to determine recurring themes in the respondents’ responses.

Findings

Qualitative Findings

Family fun time activities presented four common themes: bonding, learning, motivation, and time. These themes answer the research question: Do family fun time activities affect family involvement? Out of the 38 survey responses coded across three different years, 18 presented bonding, 13 were based on motivation, 11 discussed time, and 22 related to learning. Head start families seem to enjoy pre-planned activities that save time and encourage learning.

Bonding

Bonding was apparent or mentioned in 18 out of 38 surveys, where respondents reported quality bonding with their child. This theme, found through research, is essential to parental involvement and to the quality of time spent between parents and children. Many parents reported families being able to bond, and the inclusion of other family members as well. Respondent 5 from 2019 stated, “Our family was able to bond. We learned that we can learn and have fun at the same time.” This response connected bonding to having fun, where the child and parent can enjoy connecting with their child instead of viewing it as a chore.

Learning

Another theme prevalent in these activities was learning. Learning was found in 22 out of 38 surveys, with one survey from the 2023 surveys, where respondents mentioned skills their child learned from participating in the activity. Respondent 4 from 2019 mentioned, “She learned to take turns.” Taking turns, sharing, and patience are common qualities that are important for children of this age to learn, and will be carried with them throughout life. Another respondent, which proved family fun time activities’ theme of skill development, explains the specific skills that the child was able to attain through the activities. The respondent stated that “The sugar tray was my favorite because it helped Paisley with writing her name.” These responses further prove that family fun time activities teach skills that are crucial to children’s learning, that include the parent’s involvement in the learning as well.

Motivation

The motivation to engage with the child beyond the provided activity was prevalent among the surveys, where parents were encouraged to find other activities to do together, and focus on family involvement. The theme of motivation or encouragement to complete more things together was found in 13 out of 38 surveys, where respondents mentioned the family fun

time activities motivated and encouraged them to do more things as a family together in the future, and to spend more time engaging with their child. Respondent 3 from 2019 mentioned “It opened the door for other simple activities.” This concludes that the activity started the planning and thoughts behind more future activities. Another survey, mentioned “it had us spending more time together by looking up more things to do as a family.” These responses positively influence the family fun time activities’ ability to promote further family involvement and engagement.

Time

A theme of time was found in 11 out of 38 surveys, where respondents enjoyed a pre-planned, pre-made, ready to go activity that didn't require time to be spent creating the activity. Many respondents are single parents, may have other children, and busy schedules, where planning one on one time with a child may be difficult and time consuming. Parents mentioned the lack of time they have in the afternoons after school as well. Respondent 4 from 2019 mentioned, “It took less time to prepare the activity, more time to play.” This indicated that the respondent had more time to play with their child and engage, with the activity being already prepared. Another respondent who answered to the time survey question stated that “Yes it did, because most time we got other stuff to do so not able to do much together.” This indicated that the activity being pre-planned effectively increased the amount of fun time the family spent together after school.

The qualitative findings of the surveys portrayed themes of time, motivation, bonding, and learning. Parents were more likely to participate in more activities in the future with their children, and more likely to allot time for activities that engage children. Respondents felt that they spent quality bonding time, which made learning fun for everyone. This proves that the

family fun time activities, based on head start survey responses, do promote family involvement in a positive way.

Quantitative Findings

The dependent variable is self ranked encouragement for family involvement based upon the provided activity. This is asked on a 0 (Not at all) to 10 (an extreme amount) scale. The independent variable for this study is single parent households. This is operationalized using the item, “Does your child live in a single parent household?”. Answer choices for this item are “Yes”, “No”, or “Prefer not to answer”. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze these variables. The hypothesis is if family fun time activities are completed, then family involvement will increase.

The mean score for self rated encouragement for family involvement was 7.20. The Standard deviation was 2.60.

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviation of Family Involvement

Involvement Mean	Standard Deviation
7.20	2.60

Note N=66

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents measured high family involvement, with a mean of 7.20.

Table 2
Mean and Standard Deviation of Single Parent Households

Single Parent Households	Mean	Standard Deviation
Yes	79	2.4
No	68	2.7

Note N=66

Table 2 shows the comparison between respondents' single parent household status and self-ranked family involvement. This shows a mean of 79 for those who answered "Yes" to living in single parent household, and a mean of 68 for those who answered "No" to living in a single parent household.

The research on family fun time activities was to present the opportunity to increase the levels of family involvement for children attending Head Start. Sending activities home with children to complete with family was to encourage involvement, and allow for a learning activity to already be provided. The findings show that there was an increase of family involvement based on the provided activities. Family fun time activities presented four common themes: bonding, learning, motivation, and time. Respondents mentioned enjoying that the activity saved time because it was already created and provided, and that they would do more in the future.

The findings also displayed the single-parent households struggling to find time for family involvement, and their enjoyment of an activity already created. Findings suggested that Head Start parents are more likely to be living in a lower income, single-parent household where time is valuable. It is important that we remain focused on family involvement with children at a young age, especially children in lower income areas, as family involvement promotes a child's success and learning as well. We should be focusing on parent and teacher

communication about the child's behavior as well as educational ability, and providing more opportunities for children to learn at home with family.

This study shows that family fun time activities increase family involvement, and the Head Start families have difficulty finding time for activities with children. School provided activities increase family involvement, and allow children to learn outside of school. Educators need to encourage family involvement at home, and provide opportunities to increase it. Society needs more focus on family involvement with children at a young age, especially when living in a lower income area, or when living in a single-parent household.

Works Cited

- Adler-Baeder, F., Garneau, C., Vaughn, B., McGill, J., Harcourt, K. T., Ketring, S., & Smith, T. (2016). The effects of mother participation in relationship education on coparenting, parenting, and Child Social Competence: Modeling Spillover effects for low-income minority preschool children. *Family Process, 57*(1), 113–130.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12267>
- Epstein, J. L. (2010). School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan, 92*(3), 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171009200326>
- Fantuzzo, J., McWayne, C., Perry, M. A., & Childs, S. (2004). Multiple dimensions of family involvement and their relations to behavioral and learning competencies for urban, low-income children. *School Psychology Review, 33*(4), 467–480.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2004.12086262>
- Ismail, N. K., Mohamed, S., & Hamzah, M. I. (2019). The application of the fuzzy delphi technique to the required aspect of parental involvement in the effort to inculcate positive attitude among preschool children. *Creative Education, 10*(12), 2907–2921.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.1012216>
- Lee, K., & Markey, J. (2021). Effects of adverse childhood experiences on developmental outcomes for head start eligible low income children. *Journal of Social Service Research, 48*(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2021.1951925>

- Tautolo, E.-S., Schluter, P. J., & Paterson, J. (2015). Pacific father involvement and early child behavior outcomes: Findings from the Pacific Islands Families Study. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *24*(12), 3497–3505. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0151-5>
- Torres, N., Veríssimo, M., Monteiro, L., Ribeiro, O., & Santos, A. J. (2014). Domains of father involvement, social competence and problem behavior in preschool children. *Journal of Family Studies*, *20*(3), 188–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2014.11082006>
- Zalewski, M., Lengua, L. J., Fisher, P. A., Trancik, A., Bush, N. R., & Meltzoff, A. N. (2012). Poverty and single parenting: Relations with preschoolers' cortisol and effortful control. *Infant and Child Development*, *21*(5), 537–554. <https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.1759>