

Does Socio-economic Status Affect Parent Involvement?

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Abstract

The following paper explores family involvement within the families who attend Head Start and the Andy Taylor Center. Family engagement is very crucial to the learning development among children (Day & Dotter, 2018). The purpose of this study was intended to help families engage in more family involvement through learning objective activities that were sent home with children. With the activities that were sent home, there were also 99 surveys sent out between Head Start and the Andy Taylor Center, and sixteen surveys were returned back. The sixteen surveys returned back were able to be analyzed. The following study is a mixed methods study where there was quantitative data gathered as well as qualitative data. Regarding the quantitative data, the dependent variable was family involvement. Family involvement was measured on a zero to 10 scale (0-10), and the mean result was 8.16. The independent variable for the quantitative data was annual income, the answer choices were split into different annual income groups. Since the data was not large, the findings indicated there was not much of a difference in family involvement within different socioeconomic classes. Through open-ended questions on the surveys sent home, qualitative data was able to be analyzed and three themes were found after the completion of the activities: learning, enjoyment, and family involvement. The overall theme of this study is that socioeconomic class does not necessarily determine how much parental involvement there is within the family, this was found based on the responses that were returned. The practical implication of this study is that family fun time activities bring more family engagement into the family dynamic.

Introduction

The research question in this study is, “Do family fun time activities help engage families in more family involvement?” Previous studies have examined the amount of parental

involvement there is within the family and if there is a correlation based on socioeconomic class. Family involvement was found less in the homes of single-parent households (Waldfogel et al., 2010). In previous studies conducted, there is a pattern of deficiencies, family involvement is measured and the studies looked at correlations on why there was a lack of family involvement but they did not try to increase the amount of family engagement. The study conducted throughout this paper is significant because there were physical activities sent home for families to enjoy and complete together. The activities that were sent home to children and their families consisted of activities that were hands-on and crafty and, for the most part, required parents or guardians to help their children complete the activities. The purpose of this study was to determine if family fun time activities will increase family involvement.

Literature Review

Family involvement can be defined in lots of different ways. Family involvement can be helping children complete homework, eating dinner as a family, and most importantly family involvement is when there is inclusion between families completing activities that help children's development and learning abilities. As stated in an article, family involvement can also be defined as "...centering on parents' responsibilities for ensuring engagement" or "parents being actively involved in their child's life and education" (Gross et al., 2020 p.747 & p.750). Parent involvement in a child's life is proven to help the child substantially in education and in everyday life. In multiple studies that have been conducted, they have demonstrated that parental involvement in a child's education has improved academic outcomes (Day & Dotterer, 2018). Not every family is able to prioritize and practice family involvement and this can be a result of the family's socioeconomic status or social class (Waldfogel et al., 2010).

Family Involvement Within Lower-Class Families

As stated previously, parent involvement is exceedingly important when it comes to a child's academic performance in education and learning (Day & Dotterer, 2018). One out of every five children in the United States lives in poverty which means one out of five children are not getting the parental involvement they should be getting in order to succeed (Baker et al., 2018). Parental involvement is crucial to a child's academic performance, poor children score significantly less on reading and math skills when transitioning into kindergarten which has been shown to play a part in future academic success (Baker et al, 2018).

Children who live in a single-parent household also tend to fare worse and lack engagement in family involvement because of the scarcity of stability (Waldfogel et al., 2010). Stability within families helps children focus more and it provides a more secure household. Studies have also proven that households that only contain one parent may not have the time to be as involved in family involvement as households that have two parents. There was a study conducted in Hong Kong where researchers examined academic data and compared it to children with two parents in the household versus single-mother households and single-father households (Cheung & Park 2016). They found that in single-father households, there tend to be negative effects on educational outcomes. Academic success is highest in a two-parent household with single-mother households falling second. Another interesting study was conducted where students were sent home with a few different things. A consent form for the parent(s) to fill out and a set of questionnaires. The children were given two tests in regard to their language skills and their overall well-being. Again, they found similar results. When parents are highly involved with their children it brings out overall positive results regarding academics, social skills, and psychological well-being. There is an obvious pattern between all research studies that have been

conducted. If a parent, a guardian, or whoever is in charge of children is involved in their life and willing to help and be there for them, they will overall succeed in many different ways.

Program to Promote educational readiness within Low Socio-economic families

The Head Start program is a program that helps low socio-economic families with child care and learning educational principles. Head Start was founded in 1965 due to President Johnson's War on Poverty, the purpose that they opened their doors was "...to provide comprehensive services to poor children of preschool age" (Pasachoff, 2003. [Abstract]). The program is aware that these lower social class families need extra assistance when it comes to their children learning the same and having the same opportunities as children in the high social class. Head Start wants to set up these children for success in the future. While the program itself aids families, it also "influences parent-child interaction in ways that promote children's social and cognitive development" (Affholter et al., 1983. [Abstract]). Children who attend Head Start have fared better in their reading and math skills and have had fewer behavioral problems than low socioeconomic children who did not attend the program (Lee, 2011).

The research question that provides a basis for this paper is: Do family fun time activities help families engage in more family involvement? Studies have proven that family involvement helps children become more successful in terms of their academics and social development. Through Head Start, this is a project being are conducted where there will be activities made for children to take home and complete with their families. If these activities are completed, family involvement rates will be higher and there will be a high chance for that child to be successful in future situations. Not only does family involvement help with academic success and social development, but it also helps families become closer and more trusting of each other; it creates a safe environment. Completing this research will also help identify whether or not Head Start is

achieving its goals.

Data and Methods

Instrument

A survey questionnaire was created by the 50 members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation team at Longwood University. The survey asked both open and close-ended questions. Items on the survey were designed to evaluate SMART objectives of five activities that were completed the previous week by Head Start and Andy Taylor Center families. Items were included that also addressed demographic information, enjoyment of the activities, family involvement, and completion of the activities. Hard copies of the questionnaire were delivered to Head Start and the Andy Taylor Center.

Sample

The non-probability sample for this study was based on 100 children (ages three to five years old). Seventy-nine children attended Head Start in three counties. Head Start is a federally subsidized preschool for families with economic needs. Twenty-one children attended the Andy Taylor Center which is located on a college campus, and families apply and pay for their children to attend. Attached to the questionnaire was a children's book to incentivize families to return the survey. Guardians of the children were asked to complete the survey and return it to the preschool the next day. Teachers sent a reminder home with children to return outstanding questionnaires. This resulted in sixteen questionnaires being returned. Overall, there was a 16.2% response rate.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis of the returned 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, “How involved was your family throughout the activity?” The answer choices for this item were on a scale from zero to 10, 0 = not at all, 10 = a great amount. For this study, the independent variable is income. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was, “What is your annual household income? ” The answer choices for this item were “Less than 10,000”, “\$10,000 – \$30,999”, “\$31,000 - \$50,999”, “\$51,000 – 70,999”, “\$71,000 - \$90,999”, “\$91,000 or more”, and “Prefer not to answer.”

Qualitative Analysis

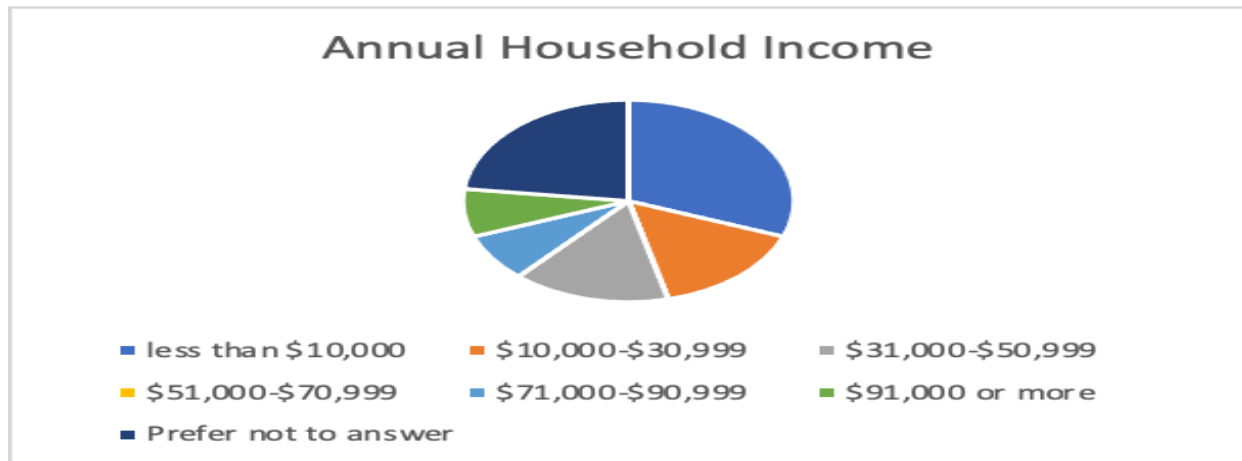
Qualitative analysis of the returned surveys was based on open-ended questions. The open-ended questions on the survey were, “What did your family enjoy most about these activities? Why?”, “What did your child learn from these activities?”, and “What recommendations would you suggest to make these activities better?” To answer the research question, “Do family fun time activities help engage families in more family involvement?”, inductive open coding was used to determine reoccurring themes in the respondents’ responses.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

My dependent variable is family involvement. It is coded on a zero to ten scale (0-10). The mean for my dependent variable is 8.16. The standard deviation for my dependent variable is 2.35. My independent variable is social class. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was, “What is your annual household income? ” The answer choices for this item were “Less than 10,000”, “\$10,000 – \$30,999”, “\$31,000 - \$50,999”, “\$51,000 – \$70,999”, “\$71,000 - \$90,999”, “\$91,000 or more”, and “Prefer not to answer.” Four respondents stated they make less than \$10,000 a year, two respondents said they make somewhere between \$10,000-\$30,999 annually, two respondents said they make somewhere between

\$31,000-\$50,999 annually, zero respondents make between \$51,000-\$70,999 annually, one respondent said they make somewhere between \$71,000-\$90,999 annually, one respondent said they make \$91,000 or more, and three respondents stated they preferred not to answer.



The mean for respondents who made less than \$10,000 annually is 8.33 out of 10. The mean for respondents who made somewhere between \$10,00-\$30,999 is 8.50 out of 10. The mean for respondents who made somewhere between \$31,000-\$50,999 is 10.00 out of 10. There is no mean for \$51,000-\$70,999 because none of the respondents made that annually. The mean for respondents who made somewhere between \$71,000-\$90,999 is 2.00 out of 10. The mean for respondents who made \$91,000 or more is 10.00 out of 10.

Generally speaking, there are seven different categories of income and only 16 respondents so the data is not large. The mean for respondents who preferred not to answer is 7.00 out of 10. This data shows us that the respondents who made less than \$10,000 a year and those who made between \$10,000-\$30,000 had around the same amount of family involvement, the difference between them was only 0.17. Respondents who made somewhere between \$31,000-\$50,999 and those who made \$91,000 or more showed to have the same amount of family involvement. Those who made somewhere between \$71,000-\$90,999 had very little

family involvement and those respondents who preferred not to answer, fared decently on the family involvement scale being at 7.00 out of 10.

Qualitative Findings

Theme 1: Learning

The first theme that was found throughout the surveys was learning. When looking at how much this theme appears, it was found that it appears in eleven out of sixteen surveys that were returned back. In all eleven of the surveys, the respondents mentioned how their child was able to learn new colors, new numbers, new techniques, how to be creative, and some even learned how to be patient when it comes to focusing and learning new material. For example, respondent number five said their child learned “Colors, shapes, creativity in a fun way, and number.” Respondent number fifteen said her child learned “Patience, not giving up if something doesn’t go her way or look how she expected to.” Respondent number sixteen said, “My son learned different techniques on From the activity that he can apply in real life.” The surveys that were given back demonstrate how the children, who completed the activities that were sent home, were able to grasp and obtain new knowledge to use in their everyday life.

Theme 2: Enjoyment

The second theme that was found in the surveys was enjoyment. Of the sixteen surveys, enjoyment appeared in eight of them. In all eight of the surveys, the respondents said that their child enjoyed the activities and was entertained throughout. The qualitative data found that the children and family enjoyed putting shapes together, that the materials were provided, and that the family could enjoy them together. For example, respondent number two said, “I enjoy watching [child] complete these activities while I assist her.” Respondent number three said, “Our family really enjoyed how simple the activities were and how much our child enjoyed

them...” Respondent number seven said, “We enjoyed putting all the different shapes together on the pizza survey.” Respondent number thirteen said that they enjoyed the “materials provided and the variety of the activities.” This feedback from the respondents was able to tell us that the children enjoyed the activities and even the parents were able to enjoy them whether that was them helping their child, watching their child have fun, or just simply being provided with free activities for their child to complete.

Theme 3: Family Involvement

The third theme that was formed from the surveys was family involvement. Family involvement is composed of lots of different things but it can be something as little as doing little activities together as a family, family involvement does not always have to be the whole family, it can be just the child and guardian. Of the sixteen surveys returned back, family involvement showed up in seven of the surveys. In all seven of the surveys, respondents said that they enjoyed the time that was spent together with their child while completing these activities and said that the activities were something fun to do as a family. Respondent three said that their child, “...even completing some with siblings.” Respondent four said that there was “Time spent together.” Respondent five said, “It’s fun when you want to do something fun and enjoyable for kids and family.” Respondents nine and ten said they enjoyed “Doing them together.” Respondent ten also said “[Child] says that she loves doing things with mom and dad.” The qualitative feedback from the respondents provided us with intel about how these activities were able to create more family involvement within the families.

Conclusion

In conclusion of the following study, it was shown that family involvement is very important and crucial to a child’s development of social skills, learning abilities, and

psychological well-being. When stability is present in a home, there are more opportunities for family engagement which will help the child become successful in the future. Data, that was received from surveys that were sent home, was able to be gathered and analyzed and it showed that there is not much of a correlation between social class/socioeconomic status and family involvement. Whether a parent or a guardian is involved in their child's life is reliant on the parent. To tie together all of this research, it was found that family involvement has been proven to improve a child's overall well-being but family involvement is not reliant on an individual's socioeconomic status. It was also found that the family fun time activities that were sent home to children in Head Start and the Andy Taylor Center increased the amount of family involvement within families. They were able to increase family involvement by having the whole family work together to complete the activities.

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