**Family Involvement in Head Start**

Hannah DeLong

Department of Criminal Justice and Sociology, Longwood University

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Dr. JoEllen Pederson

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**Abstract**

 The problem we will address is the amount of family involvement in lower-income areas. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the different reasons why family involvement affects lower-income areas. This study takes place in rural Virginia at a Head Start center. Head Start is an early childhood education center for low-income families. The participants who will be studied are children the ages of three to five and a guardian or caregiver. This is a mixed methods study and will analyze the qualitative and quantitative data. In the qualitative findings, we coded and found similarities and differences in 38 survey responses. The three themes we found were bonding, motivation, and learning. The quantitative data shows the mean and standard deviation of the different levels of education. The practical implication of this study was to see the amount of family involvement related to the highest education of the child’s parent or guardian.

**Introduction**

The amount of family involvement is crucial in a child’s life. The research question is “Do family fun time activities affect family involvement?” The purpose of the research was to measure the amount of involvement families have with the game. Another purpose was to evaluate the program to determine the satisfaction of the volunteers or clients and how the game performs for the family. This is an important research topic because it allows us to see how different things such as the highest form of education affect family involvement. This study needed to be completed to see if the amount of education affected family involvement.

 The survey question I will use to operationalize your dependent variable is “How much did this activity encourage your family to engage with one another?” It is measured on a scale from 0-10. 0 being not at all and 10 being a great much. The attributes are how much your child engaged with the activity. The survey question I will use to operationalize the independent variable is “What is the highest degree of education you have completed?” It is measured by attributes of “Some high school, High school diploma or GED, Certification from a trade or vocational school, Some college, Associate’s degree, Bachelor’s degree, Graduate degree or more”.

**Literature Review**

Family involvement can impact a child in many different ways. This paper will examine the research on how parent involvement is affected by fun time activities. Family involvement among kids and young adults serves a purpose in education, barriers in society, and the overall growth of a person. Family involvement relates to the Epstein model. The Epstein model argues that there are six different frameworks that all contribute to family involvement. The six types of involvement is “Parenting: Type 1 involvement occurs when family practices and home environments support “children as students” and when schools understand their children’s families. Communicating: Type 2 involvement occurs when educators, students, and families “design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications.” Volunteering: Type 3 involvement occurs when educators, students, and families “recruit and organize parent help and support” and count parents as an audience for student activities. Learning at Home: Type 4 involvement occurs when information, ideas, or training are provided to educate families about how they can “help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.” Decision Making: Type 5 involvement occurs when schools “include parents in school decisions” and “develop parent leaders and representatives.” Collaborating with the Community: Type 6 involvement occurs when community services, resources, and partners are integrated into the educational process to “strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.”(Epstein, 2010). Research has proven that family involvement is essential to the education of children”(Epstein, 2010).

Growing up and transitioning into society can be very challenging for some people who do not have quality family time or family involvement. Creating good relationships in and outside of the classrooms with family members can help improve the transition into higher education. According to Kang et al. (2017), some children who have experienced more significant and drastic changes to their routines at home as they transitioned to education like kindergarten, are reported to have more physiological stress as evidenced by increased morning cortisol levels. This can be for many reasons such as parents not being involved in their child’s life or something along the lines of the family relocating recently to a new school zone. According to Hill et al. (2018), research has found that teachers want to be involved with children in the classroom because educators care about their students. There are different things a family can do to become more involved in their child’s education alongside the teachers. Some things include, “the hard work of many educators and families in many schools, we have learned that along with clear policies and strong support from state and district leaders and school principals. The trials and errors, efforts, and insights of many schools in our projects have helped to identify five important steps that a school can take to develop more positive school/family/community connections” (Epstein, 2010, p.89). Even though education plays a major role in family involvement there are also some obstacles that children have to face at home.

When it comes to society there are always going to be roadblocks that you have to navigate through to get to your destination. There are consequences in one’s life if there is no parental involvement. Such as not being taught everyday activities like doing the dishes, talking to one another, and much more. According to Hornby and Blackwell (2018), family involvement is the most critical factor in all ages of life. One barrier to family involvement is parental beliefs. Machida et al. (2002), explained that parents who view themselves and take the initiative to want to teach their children new things in life are more likely to be involved with the child and their activities as a family. This creates a barrier for children who do not have a parent who wants to teach them about social skills in life. This barrier can then lead to the child having issues with overall growth in life and society.

The overall growth of someone starts from day one. Children must have their families alongside them every step of the way. Little to no family involvement at such a young age can lead to more serious issues down the road such as mental health issues. Improving family involvement at a young age can help with mental healthcare services along the route. This began with the collaboration at an inter-organizational level, between the Department of Psychiatry at Ghent University Hospital and two family organizations for family caregivers of psychiatric patients. This program teaches families how to be better involved in their child’s life so that it does not lead to mental healthcare issues (De Corte et al. 2023). The way you grow up influences what you believe in society. For example, Izenstark and Ravindran (2023), found that having family activities out in nature such as playing a sport or taking a walk with family with the elements of the color green like the grass and trees helped the family to focus on themselves to have better bonding as a family. This finding also relates to the findings of Morrissey and Werner-Wilson (2005), who explained that there is evidence that outside-of-school activities within a family can lead to positive and productive youth development of a child. As children develop and learn new things it can be hard on the youth and young adults especially because they are going through a lot of emotional and physical changes. While growing up “youth live their lives in a variety of contexts and environments—many of them overlapping—such as family, peers, school, work, and community. Circumstances from each of the different environments have an impact on youths' preparation for, and success at, navigating the transitions inherent in their development” (Morrissey & Werner-Wilson, 2005). According to Hill et al. (2018), parents are the caregivers in the family. The children look up to the caregivers in the family because that is all the child knows at such a young age while growing up. The climate in which a child grows up will reflect the amount of family involvement a child has.

Overall, the literature presented suggests that family involvement is crucial to education, barriers in society, and the overall growth of a person. Based on previous literature, our study of how family fun time activities affect family involvement will add data and research to prove that family activities are required for the overall growth of family involvement.

**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 to the survey to guardians, and then the children brought books home 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 needs. The Haunted Runway Family Fun Time activity was sent home with the children. This activity will have the children choose clothes from their house and try them on. Then they will walk down a “runway” for the activity. This activity will test how creative the child was to find and create clothing pieces for a costume. It also tests how well the child is able to clean up after themselves. With the Haunted Runway 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 the analysis (four from 2023, 20 from 2022, and 42 from 2019).

**Quantitative Analysis**

 Quantitative analysis of completed surveys (from 2019, 2022, and 2023) 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 social economic status (SES). This is operationalized using the item What is the highest degree of education you have completed? The answer choices for this item are, “some high school”, “high school diploma or GED”, “certification from trade/vocational school”, “some college”, “associate’s degree”, “bachelor's degree”, “graduate degree or more”. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze these variables.

**Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative analysis of the completed surveys 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 activities 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**

**Quantitative Findings**

In this section, the dependent variable is “How much did this activity encourage your family to engage with one another?” It is measured on a scale from 0-10. 0 being not at all and 10 being a great amount. The attributes are how much your child engaged with the activity.

 The independent variable is “What is the highest degree of education you have completed?” It is measured by attributes of “Some high school, High school diploma or GED, Certification from a trade or vocational school, Some college, Associate degree, Bachelor degree, Graduate degree or more”.

Table 1.

| *Mean and Standard Deviation of Family Involvement* |
| --- |
| Involvement | Mean | SD |  |  |
|  | 7.20 | 2.60 |  |  |
|   |   |   |   |   |

*Note.* N=66

Table 1 shows the mean of Family Involvement which is 7.20. The table also shows the standard deviation of Family Involvement which is 2.60. These numbers were found from a data set of 66 survey responses.

Figure 1.



Figure 1 shows the highest degree of education from 66 survey responses. The red bar represents “Some high school” which is two. The green bar represents “High school or GED” which is 12. The blue bar represents “Trade school” which is 13. The pink bar represents “Some college” which is 19. The black bar represents “associate degree” which is nine. The orange bar represents “bachelor degree” which is seven. The yellow bar represents “graduate degree or more” which is one.

Table 2.

| *Mean and Standard Deviation of Family Involvement by Education* |
| --- |
|   | Mean | SD |   |   |   |
| Some HS | 8.50 | 2.12 |  |  |  |
| HS or GED | 6.41 | 2.71 |  |  |  |
| Trade or Vocational School | 7.84 | 2.93 |  |  |  |
| Some College | 6.89 | 2.02 |  |  |  |
| Associate | 7.55 | 2.29 |  |  |  |
| Bachelor | 6.42 | 4.07 |  |  |  |
| Graduate degree or more | 9.00 | NA |  |  |  |

Table 2 above shows the mean and standard deviation of Family Involvement by Education. The respondents with some High School education have a mean of 8.50 and a standard deviation of 2.12. The respondents with High School or GED have a mean of 6.41 and a standard deviation of 2.71. The respondents with Trade School or Vocational School have a mean of 7.84 and a standard deviation of 2.93. The respondents with some college have a mean of 6.89 and a standard deviation of 2.02. The respondents with an Associate degree have a mean of 7.55 and a standard deviation of 2.29. The respondents with a Bachelor degree have a mean of 6.42 and a standard deviation of 4.07. The one respondent with a Graduate degree or more has a mean of 9.00 and no standard deviation since there was nothing to compare the data to.

The original hypothesis stated, “Do Family Fun Time Activities affect family involvement”? Education had no direct impact on Family Involvement. This is proven above because no difference was found between the comparison of different education levels.

**Qualitative Findings**

In the qualitative findings, we coded and found similarities and differences in 38 survey responses. The 38 survey responses were across three years of data. The years surveyed were 2019, 2022, and 2023. The open-ended questions from the survey allow us to code the data to see the similarities across the three years of surveys.

**Bonding**

The first theme in the qualitative findings is bonding. Eighteen out of 38 survey responses include some type of family bonding experience. The theme of bonding allows the parents and children to create a relationship around family fun time activities. Respondent 19\_07 stated, “We enjoyed sitting down together doing the activity as [a] family. He felt like he [was] a boy doing homework and making something with his own hands. We will allow him to do more activities”. This response shows the theme of bonding because this family was able to do something together. It also allowed the child to bond with his family to be able to do more activities in the future. Another example of the theme of bonding is from respondent 19\_05. They stated, “Our family was able to bond. We learned that we can learn and have fun at the same time”. This response further explains why the theme of bonding is not only beneficial to the child but the family as a whole. Bonding with family is very special and important for all participants because it allows you to learn new things. The last example of bonding was from respondent 19\_08. They stated, “It had us spending time together by looking up more things to do as a family”. This example of bonding shows that the family will continue to bond in future activities together.

**Motivation**

The second theme in the qualitative findings is motivation. 13 out of 38 survey responses include some type of motivation to engage in family fun time activities. Respondent 22\_15 stated, “Patience, not giving up if something doesn’t go her or look the way she expected it to”. This response shows that the activity was able to give the child motivation to keep going when she had frustration. Another response that proves motivation was from respondent 19\_03 “Time spent together and being able to do crafts. It opened the door for other simple activities”. This response shows that the family fun time activities can encourage and motivate families to do other crafts and activities beyond what is provided. The last response that shows motivation as a common theme was from respondent 19\_10 stated, “The animal dice game [it] got the family physically active. Great way to promote healthy family activities. Making it fun!!!”. This response further proves that the theme of motivation encourages families to get together and exercise to be healthy and active.

**Learning**

The third theme in the qualitative findings is learning. 22 out of 38 survey responses include some type of learning from the activities. The theme of learning can be examined through multiple responses. The first respondent 22\_16 stated, “My son learned different techniques [on] from the activity that he can apply to real life”. This response shows us that the activities allowed this child to learn life skills that he can use moving forward in the future. The next response that further explains how the children learned from the family fun time activities was from respondent 22\_02 stated, “[child’s name] learn how to cut and glue. And how to trace better”. Another survey response was from respondent 23\_03. They stated, “Seeing how much my son has learned in school, knowing his colors & numbers”. All of the responses stated above prove that the theme of learning was an outcome of the family fun time activities. Overall, family fun time activities were able to teach children new skills by allowing them to practice different skills that they can use in the future later down the road.

**Conclusion**

 Overall, the main purpose of this research was to measure the amount of involvement families have with the game. Another purpose is to evaluate the program to determine the satisfaction of the volunteers or clients and how the game performs for the family. This is an important research topic because it allows us to see how different things such as the highest form of education affect family involvement. The findings indicate that the level of education of a person does not affect family involvement because the highest level of education did not affect the amount of family involvement. This research study is important because family involvement is crucial to a child’s early development stages. Society needs to realize that family involvement is a great way to engage with a young child. The surveys sent out to Head Start families reflect this because one common theme was bonding. These families said that it brought their family closer and will be doing more activities together in the future.

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