**What Makes a Family**

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**Abstract**

Parental involvement is often found to be closely associated with the academic performances of children (Topor et al., 2014). The problem though is the parental involvement or perhaps the lack thereof. The reason for lesser involvement from parents can be one of a few things. It comes down to the socioeconomic status of the family, the mental health of the parent or parents, and amount of time parents have to commit to being involved with their children. However, the purpose of this study is to understand how socioeconomic status affects parental involvement. The qualitative data consisted of asking what the children learned from the activities as well as what they most enjoyed about them. The quantitative data consisted of elements such as the level of enjoyment from activities, the race of the parents and children, the type of household, and the household income of the family. After completion of the survey, three themes became clear: family involvement, learning, and patience. A majority of participants, in their qualitative responses, mentioned that their children exhibited these qualities in response to the activities. Also exhibited in the results was the statistical revelation that families with a lower socioeconomic status were more likely to have lower levels of parental involvement with their children. The takeaway is the need for more programs specifically aimed at families and households with lower socioeconomic statuses to better the academic performances of the children within those households.

**Introduction**

The problem this study investigates is parental involvement, specifically how a lack of it can lead to poor academic performance from children. Several studies have examined this problem in the past, all of them looking at it with three different root causes in mind. Those three causes being socioeconomic status (SES), mental health, and time commitment. Arguably, the biggest flaw in all of these studies is that they all sought to find a blanket reason for the lack of involvement. They examined large amounts of participants throughout their education over large periods of time rather than looking at smaller individual families on a case by case basis. This study does what those before it did not. The reason a study like this is necessary is to discover ways to help children improve both their academic abilities and their familial relationships. Families struggling with money or marital problems can benefit from understanding the importance of spending time with their kids even if it is only brief, along with the added benefit of better academic performance from their children as a result. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the effect of “Family Fun Time Activities” on parental involvement and how it affects the academic performance of children.

**Literature Review**

The goal of this literature review is to analyze multiple academic journal articles and see how they relate. The topics of these sources all relate back to parental involvement, which is when parents are actively involved in the education of their children through both school and extracurricular activities. The academic sources will be divided into three sections covering the different divides between groups: SES, mental health, and time commitment.

 First, SES is essentially the combination of factors such as education level and income which determine an individual's standing on the socioeconomic scale. All four of these articles have a similarity in their findings which attribute higher SES to more parental involvement. Kalil and Ryan (2020) examine what is causing the divide between high and low SES families when it comes to parental involvement as well as what can be done to help close said divide. At the end of their examination, the two concluded that the major factor contributing to the level of stress lower SES parents face and that these stress levels could potentially be lowered through programs designed to aid parents with these struggles as well as others. Robinson and Harris (2013) examine whether various factors such as racial and class differences can have an impact on the ways that parents react to their children’s academic achievements or lack thereof. Their findings showed that regardless of factors such as class or income level, black parents tend to respond to poor academic achievements with punishments more than white parents. Chen and Zhu (2017) sought to study children from kindergarten to the fifth grade in search of certain factors which could be used to determine levels of parental involvement between children and their parents. The results concluded that, by measuring children at multiple different points throughout their elementary school experience, a more long-term method of tracking parental involvement could be implemented. Kaiser (2017) sought to examine whether or not factors such as the personality of their mother and SES play a role in the development of a child’s sense of focus. The results of the study lined up with the only other study of its nature and found that SES plays a big part in children developing the ability to focus (Kaiser & Diewald, 2014).

The two articles dealing with mental health share findings that poor mental health in parents leads to less parental involvement. The first article, written by Baydar et al. (2003), examined the effectiveness of parenting in both mothers with and without negative mental health factors to determine whether one group had an advantage in comparison. The study found that a large quantity of mothers with negative mental health factors were more likely to harshly discipline their children causing potential further negative effects to their academic performance. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) sought to examine if parental involvement had an impact on both academic and social performance of high school aged children. The study found that parental involvement did improve both areas of performance, although certain activities were more beneficial to one area of performance over the other.

The last articles share a theme of time commitment with the results of both articles finding that the more time parents devote to being involved with their kids, the higher their academic performances. Fomby and Musick (2017) examined whether or not the overall amount of time mothers spent with their children produced better academic outcomes. The results showed that although the amount of time spent increased the children’s academic performances, it led to a negative impact on their externalized behaviors later on in life. Berthelsen and Walker (2008), examined whether or not parental involvement during the early years of children’s schooling can lead to positive academic outcomes. The results showed that the majority of students had both involved parents and good academic performances.

In conclusion, all of the studies within their respective sections had similarities to one another’s findings and all of those findings aid with our current study. We now know that SES, mental health, and time committed are all factors that improve parental involvement the higher they are.

**Data and Methodology**

**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 closed-ended questions. Questions 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. Questions 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 99 children, ages three to five years old. Seventy-eight children attend Head Start in three counties. Head Start is a federally subsidized 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 incentivise 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 closed-ended questions. For this study, the dependent variable is family involvement. The question from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was, “How involved was your family throughout the activity?”. The answer choices for this question were on a scale from zero to ten. The independent variable is socioeconomic status. The question from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was, “What is your annual household income?”. The answer choices for this question 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”. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze these variables.

**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, “How do family fun time activities affect parental involvement? Specifically, I am interested in how socioeconomic status affects parental involvement.”, inductive open coding was used to determine recurring themes in the respondents’ responses.

**Findings**

**Quantitative Findings**

My dependent variable is family involvement. The question from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was, “How involved was your family throughout the activity?”. The answer choices for this question were on a scale from zero to ten. The mean for this variable is 9.55. The standard deviation for this variable is 0.9341. The independent variable is socioeconomic status. The question from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was, “What is your annual household income?”. 31% of respondents had a household income of less than $10,000. 15% of respondents had a household income of $10,000 - $30,999. 15% of respondents had a household income of $31,000 - $50,999. 0% of respondents had a household income of $51,000 - $70,999. 8% of respondents had a household income of $71,000 - $90,999. 8% of respondents had a household income of $91,000 or greater. 23% of respondents preferred not to answer. For families with a household income of less than $10,000 or $91,000 or greater, the average enjoyment was a nine. For families with a household income in the range of $10,000 - $90,999, the average enjoyment was ten.



The overall finding is that respondents with a lower household income had a lower average in family involvement.

**Qualitative Findings**

 The first theme is family. The theme of family is mentioned by the respondents in nine out of sixteen surveys. The theme of family relates to the amount of time the respondents, the children participating in the activities, and other members of their family spent participating in the activities. Respondent one describes it as “A free convenient activity to do as a family”. Respondent three says “Our family really enjoyed how simple the activities were and how much our child enjoyed them, even completing some with siblings”. Lastly, respondent ten says that they enjoyed “Doing them together. Our child says she loves doing things with Mom and Dad”. The reason all this is relevant is that activities called “Family Fun Time Activities” should have an impact on specifically family. With that in mind, the data points to the aforementioned “Family Fun Time Activities” increasing the amount of time families spent together in the majority of responses.

 The next theme is learning. This theme appeared in seven out of sixteen surveys from respondents. For the theme of learning, the respondents in question each specifically mentioned that their child learned new or expanded on previously known skills or information. According to respondent two, her daughter “learned how to cut and glue and how to trace better”. Respondent four remarked that the part they enjoyed the most was “Time spent together. The talks, learning”. Similarly, respondent seven stated “My child learned how to be creative”. The takeaway here is that not only are these activities encouraging more family time among participants, but that the children involved are learning from these activities as well. Specifically they’re learning things such as cutting, gluing, tracing, and how to be creative. This would suggest that “Family Fun Time Activities” are indeed helping children learn as a result.

 The last theme is patience. This theme appeared in five out of sixteen surveys. For this theme, each respondent mentioned in their response that their child either learned to take turns or to be patient. Respondent four stated that the activities “Help w/ mood, to be patient”. Respondent ten said that the activities helped their child with “Letters, numbers, how to take turns, also a little bit of reading”. Last but not least, respondent fourteen said “It takes time and patience to complete things but it can also be fun”. This theme suggests that the “Family Fun Time Activities” not only helped children learn educational skills, but useful life skills as well. The saying patience is a virtue is one of the truest sayings ever spoken, and now the children of these respondents have learned a virtue.

**Conclusion**

The main focus of this research was to determine the effects of different circumstances on parental involvement. The findings show a couple of important things. For one, families with lower household incomes tend to have a lower level of involvement. This aligns with the previous studies which found that households with lower SES had lower levels of parental involvement. They also showed that the “Family Fun Time Activities” lead to an overall increase in families spending time with each other, children learning better, and children learning the virtue of patience. Now, how does this all fit together and why does it matter? Well it matters because it means that those families in the lower household income bracket, specifically the children, benefit from more parental and family involvement. The same can be said for families with higher household incomes, more involvement within families leads to better performance academically from their children. With all of this in mind, the main takeaway of this survey is that small activities such as “Family Fun Time Activities” work by encouraging families to take a short time to interact with one another to complete a fun project while also helping the children better themselves educationally.

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