**Family Involvement: A Study on Family Involvement and Socio-Economic Status**

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SOCL 345: Social Research and Program Evaluation

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November 27, 2022

**Abstract**

Understanding the influences of family involvement has been examined through many studies where family involvement is correlated with the following: socio-economic status, the environment, and the factors which exist inside these categories such as household income, guardian(s) level of education, time, location, and cultural factors (Balli et al., 1998; Day & Dotterer, 2018; Lareau, 1987; Lee et al., 2017; Vinopal & Gershenson, 2015). Previous research has focused on age groups ranging from elementary-aged to college-aged students and their relation to family involvement. There appears to be a lack in research focusing on families with children not yet in elementary school and what can possibly increase family involvement. The purpose of this study was to examine how family involvement is affected by Family Fun Time Activities in relation to socio-economic status (SES). This research was conducted by the Longwood University Sociology Department by surveying community pre-school families through the assistance of the Head Start and Andy Taylor Center families. This study was mixed methods with a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative consisted of questions answering demographics, completion or achievement of SMART objectives, and the rate of involvement and enjoyment of the activities. Qualitative findings consist of open answers describing ways to improve the activities, what the child learned, and what was enjoyed most about the activities. Common themes seen throughout the results were convenience, skill development, and opportunities for family bonding in participant’s qualitative answers. The overall data suggest there was no relationship between socio-economic status and family involvement. Results suggested activities oriented around convenience, skill development, and opportunities for bonding are related to family involvement. This study could possibly be repeated with a larger sample size with chance of a larger response rate.

**Family Involvement: A Study on Family Involvement and Socio-Economic Status**

**Introduction**

Family involvement has been continuously studied to understand the influence and benefits it has on young children. Family involvement could be defined as the active participation of parent(s) (guardians) in different activities or interactions in order to encourage learning, development, and relationships with their children (Ma et al., 2015). Though much must be considered when understanding the ability and the chances of encouraging overall family involvement, this includes considering parental involvement all together. Many aspects come into play when considering a parent(s) ability to be more involved in a child’s life in and out of school settings (Stacer & Perrucci, 2012). Research suggests parent involvement should be more intense during early childhood education, being that it is the child’s most crucial developmental period (Ma et al., 2015) and produces emotional benefits for child development (Reinke et al., 2019). However, when considering how much a parent can interact and be involved with their child includes many societal and personal factors. These factors may include environment and socio-economic status (SES). Previous research has been focused on age groups ranging from elementary-aged students to college-aged students. There appears to be a lack of research studying ways to develop greater family involvement in age groups prior to elementary school. How do we possibly increase family involvement? The the following will discuss the many factors that influence a parent’s (guardian) ability to be more involved, the benefits it has on the child to be more involved, and ways family involvement could possibly be increased; with a focus on children in the age range of pre-school education which will lead to the purpose of this study; examining how family involvement is affected by Family Fun Time Activities, which assess family involvement, in relation to SES.

**Environment**

When understanding a family’s ability to engage, one may consider the environment in which a child is exposed to and the resources that are available to them; including the community and social factors. It is well understood based on your economic location one may have more opportunities than the other. Based upon previous research, amongst families with children in Head Start, those who reside in urban communities have higher levels of family engagement, compared to those in rural geographical regions when examining survey results from both rural and urban head start families (Keys, 2014). Having knowledge of this could possibly suggest there are environmental advantages and disadvantages to family engagement. Of course, one would also need to consider the parent’s perception of involvement to encourage family involvement. When considering how a parent is involved with their children their cultural experiences may come into play. Stacer and Perrucci (2012) mention research previously conducted by Balli et al. (1998), Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1995), Lareau (1987), and Trotman (2001), which suggested parents may perceive their educational experience inferior to their child’s educational system, resulting in them ineffectively participating in their child’s education. Thus, this information could suggest parents may find themselves not a fit enough parent to participate in select activities with their child.

**Socio-Economic Status**

When considering a parent(s) or guardian(s) ability to engage and become more involved with a child the obstacles which prohibit them to do so must be considered. This would include considering the flexibility of resources which the parent is able to provide. After analyzing data from the Parent and Family Involvement Survey Stacer and Perrucci (2012) found that majority of elementary school (kindergarten-fifth grade) parents who worked more hours were less involved with school, but other resources which may put a restraint on time had no effect such as family size and type. Furthermore, when measuring parent participants on their education, those who had a high school education were less involved with their child’s school education compared to those with a college education, or graduate, or professional school (Stacer & Perrucci, 2012). Stacer and Perrucci (2012) suggest household income displayed a positive relationship for White and Latino families when examining school involvement. However, income did not affect Black parents’ involvement with education but lacked positive change for more involvement at home or personal settings. This is consistent when examining later developments in education. Day and Dotterer (2018) suggest low SES high school/adolescent students, who have more focused home-based involvement strategies were more benefited, especially when reviewing GPAs.

Not only that, but when considering both a mother and father their SES plays an influential role in their ability to be involved with their kids. Fathers who are presumed to be less educated are more likely to spend less shared time with their children and even less individual child time (Vinopal & Gershenson, 2015). This could be due to work-time constraints of having a more rigorous low-income work schedule. This was also seen in mothers when having work-oriented schedules. When mothers were given more time to spend with their child not involving work related responsibilities, they were able to move toward a more parent-oriented profile (Lee et al., 2017). Therefore, when considering the ability of a family to be more involved, understanding a parent’s ability to do so is crucial because having the time and financial stability to create stronger bonds, supervise at home, participate in education, and being able to engage are all key factors to family involvement (Ma et al., 2015).

Based off the previous research academic and social development is to be considered important across all developmental age groups (Reinke et al., 2019); while most of this research focused mainly on those who fit the criteria of elementary through college education. With parent involvement playing a major role in family involvement, research has measured parental involvement in various ways (Harris & Robinson, 2016) and has suggested many occurrences which may conflict with parent involvement (Vinopal & Gershenson, 2015). These conflicts may include SES, time restraints, and the environment which a family experiences. With a lack in research understanding how to resolve these conflicts in younger age groups, further research could be conducted with families involved with children in Head Start (younger children) and give parents activities which could possibly increase parental involvement, convenient to majority of families regardless of backgrounds and restraints; possibly increasing family involvement and bonds. This could also open the door to further research on activities where larger age groups could benefit from family involving activities.

**Data and Methodology**

**Instrument**

A survey questionnaire was created by the 50 members of the Social Research and 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 activity. 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-five years old). Seventy-nine children attend Head Start in three counties. Head Start is federally funded 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% 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 this activity?”. The answer choices for the item were on a scale of zero to ten. For the study the independent variable was socio-economic status. The item on the questionnaire 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, 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?”, “What recommendations would you suggest to make these activities better?” To answer the research question, “How socio-economic status (SES) affects family involvement?”, inductive open coding was used to determine reoccurring themes in the respondents’ responses.

**Quantitative Findings**

The dependent variable measured in this study was family involvement. Family involvement was measured using the following question and response choice(s): “How involved was your family throughout the activity? (scale 0-10; 0 = not at all, 10 = a great amount)”. With 16 surveys and 14 participants responding to the previous question, an average of 9.07 was recorded for family involvement. Approximately 57% of participants described their family involvement throughout the activity as “a great amount”. While approximately 14% rated nine, 7% rated eight, and 22% rated seven out of 10 for overall family involvement throughout the activity.

The independent variable measured in relation to family involvement was annual household income to measure the following research question: “how socio-economic   
status (SES) affects family involvement.” The question asked on the survey which operationalized the independent variable is as follows: “What is your annual household income? Less than $10,000, $10,000-$30,999, $31,000-$50,999, $51,000-$70,999, $71,000-$90,999, $91,000 or more, Prefer not to answer”. Out of 13 of the 16 surveys, the following are the annual household incomes and the percentage of participants in the previously stated categories: 31% made less than $10,000, 15% made $10,000-$10,999, 15% made $31,000-$50,999, no participants made $51,000-$70,999, 8% made $71,000-$90,999, 8% made $91,000 or more, and 23% preferred not to answer.

When examining the relationship between annual household income and analysis, results suggested there was no relationship between the two variables. Nevertheless, participants who made less than $10,000 had an average of eight when rating family involvement, compared to all other higher incomes with an average of ten rating for family involvement. Although the relationship between income and family involvement could not be examined, participants who preferred not to answer regarding their income had an average rating of eight for family involvement. Overall, the data suggest that annual household income and family involvement had no significant relationship. Refer to Figure 1 to examine this.

**Figure 1**

*Rating of family involvement in relation to household income*

Chart, bar chart

Description automatically generated

*Note.* This figure demonstrates the relationship between the average rating of family involvement and household income.

**Qualitative Findings**

The qualitative findings comprised three consistent themes when describing the participant’s experience with the Family Fun Time Activities: convenience, opportunities for family bonding, and different forms of learning the participant’s child learned after the activities. When given the opportunity to discuss what the participant(s) found they enjoyed about the activities, how convenient the activities were appealed to many. For example, survey one states they enjoyed “a free convenient activity to do as a family and appreciated how it was “pre-packaged”. Survey three seemed to follow suit when stating “enjoyed how simple the activities were and how much their child enjoyed them”. This suggests when enjoying family involving activities, the family appreciates when the activity is easily completed and does not require extra materials not already accessible with the activity and may even be more involved when the child and the guardian(s) are able to both equally understand the task at hand. Survey sixteen’s open answer seemed to support this when asking about what their family enjoyed most about the activities stating, “how easy the directions were”. Not only that, along with the theme of convenience, survey thirteen enjoyed how the “materials were provided”. Altogether, these statements suggest having relatively simple activities with materials that do not require extra purchase(s), is appreciated when participating in family-engaging activities.

The activities given to the families also appeared to create opportunities where the family were able to bond. For example, “doing them together. [child’s name] says she loved doing things with mom and dad”, was stated by survey ten when referring to what they enjoyed about the activities; suggesting the child found an enjoyable bonding experience with their parents and even the parent(s) was able to appreciate the chance of being able to enjoy the activity together. This opportunity for bonding seems to not only appear for a parent and child, but for the sibling(s) also. Survey three found they enjoyed how much their child enjoyed them and even “completing them with siblings”. This suggests these activities not only assisted with bonding between the parent and child but created a chance for bonding with other siblings within the household. Other statements seem to support this when stating how the family together were bonding including the following “my family and son enjoyed doing the little thing we was doing together” stated survey twelve and “it’s fun for when you want to do something fun and enjoyable for kids and family” stated by survey five.

Furthermore, these activities seemed to assist the children with developing different skills, motor and cognitive. This is seen through the many skills the participants listed the children exhibited when asked what they learned from the activities. For example, survey fourteen states, “[the child learned] it takes time and patience to complete things but it can also be fun”; suggesting the child developed the skill or aptitude of patience when completing tasks and connecting that with enjoyment. This was also seen in survey fifteen’s response,”[the child learned] patience not giving up if something doesn’t go her way or look how she expected it to”. This suggests not only did the child develop their skills in patience but understanding a life skill where events may happen which may not bring them desirable outcomes or may be completely different outcomes altogether. While other children improved or practiced their motor skills and learned new information. Survey two stated their child developed the skill to “cut and glue. and how to trace better”. Similarly, survey six stated their child “loved cutting and gluing”; helping these practice those crucial motor and coordination skills. Survey nine’s child was even able to learn “letters, numbers, and how to take turns”. Survey ten described their child having learned their “letters, numbers, and how to take turns, also a little bit of reading.” All the previous statements suggest these activities helped their children practice different learning skills hands-on and mentally. Overall, these qualitative responses suggest conveniency as a factor when benefiting family involvement. In addition, having convenient, simple tasks may create a greater opportunity for families to have a bonding experience. Moreover, having educational activities which allow the child to practice skills in different areas including cognitive and motor, may help development in these skill areas.

**Conclusion**

This study was conducted to study family involvement through the use of Family Fun Time Activities with an independent variable of SES, to understand its relation to family involvement. Dissimilar to previous research, the results suggest there was no correlation between family involvement and SES. It is important to consider other elements which may correlate with family involvement, with the results displaying no relationship between SES and family involvement, this possibly suggest another factor is related to or influences how much a family is involved. There was a consistent theme of conveniency, skill development, and family bonding opportunities being components when creating activities oriented around family involvement. Creating activities which consist of the previously stated themes could possibly increase family involvement beyond pre-school aged children and their families. The use of these activities and the age rage could be expanded and used on a larger age group possibly increasing family involvement in demographically different families instead of a focus on only pre-schooled aged children.

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