

Family Fun Time Activities and Parental Involvement

Raegan Smith

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice, Longwood University

SOCL 345: Social Research and Program Evaluation

Dr. JoEllen Pederson

November 22, 2023

Abstract

Lack of parental involvement, especially in low-income families can put children at risk for various academic and socioemotional problems in school (McWayne et al., 2004). The purpose of this study is to understand if family fun time activities strengthen parental involvement in a child's day-to-day life. The research was conducted by Longwood University students to understand parental involvement at Head Start. This is a mixed methods study, analyzing open-ended, demographical, and questions directly related to activity involvement. Qualitative data produced themes of children learning and practicing, parental participation, and fine motor skills. Quantitative data produced mixed results regarding if children lived in single-parent households. Family fun time activities are beneficial for promoting academic and social well-being for children.

Introduction

Family Fun Time Activities were sent home to Head Start children within five counties. The survey responses were analyzed to measure if these activities improved family involvement in Head Start programs. Data from 2019 and 2022 were incorporated in with 2023 data due to low response rates this year. A mixed method study was used to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data to further support the research question. Previous works on family involvement demonstrate how parental involvement has impacted children historically.

Literature Review

Parental involvement greatly impacts a child's academic performance, behavior, and personal life. There is substantial research in the involvement of parents in their child's lives; aspects of culture and socioeconomic status, family, and teachers have significant impacts on parental involvement. In addition to this, parental involvement occurs at every stage of life, from preschool to adulthood. This literature review will examine each of these aspects as it relates to parental involvement and how research can be expanded to understand the topic further.

Culture in Parental Involvement

Cultural differences affect how parents are involved in their children's lives, which can affect a child's academic achievement and behavior. In a study conducted by Parmar & Nathans (2022), they examined parental involvement in India. They found both boys and girls had better educational outcomes when rating parents to be more involved and warm. Furthermore, perceived parental involvement directly affects student motivation, homework performance, and behavior (Núñez et al, 2021). However, stronger parental warmth impacted girls' educational outcomes; girls had higher rates of parental involvement and warmth as compared to boys. Boys were found to have higher behavioral problems compared to girls.

This is due to gender roles performed by parents; the “strict father” and “kind mother” can impact a child’s academic and behavioral performance (Parmar & Nathans, 2022). However, there are limitations with this research. Núñez et al, (2021) used self-reporting measures rather than a multitude of measures to collect data; this can include interviews with parents and students, diaries, and observations. Multiple methods of collecting data are useful because there is more information to rely on rather than utilizing a single method. Culture is an important factor when looking at parental involvement because expanding participant pools allows for more diverse results.

Socioeconomic Status, Family, and Teacher Involvement

Socioeconomic status is another important factor when examining parental involvement. Perrigo et al (2022) conducted a qualitative study amongst families of low-SES, seeking to understand how parents of these families describe involvement in their children’s educations despite socioeconomic disadvantages. They sought out more enrichment activities with their children, however, financial limitations prevented them from engaging in these types of activities. However, parents demonstrating higher education involvement are more likely to engage in cognitive stimulation; this can be reading books or counting blocks with their children (Ansari & Gershoff, 2015). Lower SES parents are not less involved because of lack of care; rather, it is due to lack of social, economic, and cultural resources (DeLuca et al., 2016; Hardie, 2015; Lareau & Cox, 2011). Structurally disadvantaged parents provide support through encouragement and emotions (Auerbach, 2006, 2007; Castellanos et al., 2013; Previ et al., 2020). Although low-SES families may not have proper access to extracurricular activities with their child, it may be beneficial for other family members to become involved. Parents’ definitions of involvement broadened, adding that sibling involvement is an important factor (Perrigo et al., 2022). Educational involvement in the home is associated with a child’s self-control, responsibility, and cooperative behavior with

family (McWayne et al., 2004). In addition to more family members becoming involved, teacher involvement is important as well. Parents reported low levels of communication with teachers, thus indicating that they believed their child was performing well academically (Perrigo et al., 2022). However, parent reports of educational involvement at home correlates positively with teacher reports in academic performance, intellectual achievement, and classroom behavior (McWayne et al., 2004). Teacher and staff training on how to involve parents in their children's lives is linked to more parental involvement (Ansari & Gershoff, 2015). However, there are some concerns with these studies. How parental involvement can affect adopted children should be taken into consideration. In the Perrigo et al. (2022) study, there are numerous factors that should be considered when conducting research. First, qualitative studies do not generalize the way quantitative findings do. There were also time limitations on the data collected; parents were asked to recall times of past involvement rather than present. The data would have also been more broad had input from teachers, other family members, and the children themselves been considered. Research should also include families of all class statuses and backgrounds to produce more broad results.

Parental Involvement for All Ages

Most research examines parental involvement for children at young ages but usually excludes how parents are involved with their children at later stages. Van Stee (2022) examined what happens to parental involvement when children exit high school and begin adulthood. Cultural aspects like marriage and parenthood cause for new shifts and opportunities for parental involvement (Cherlin, 2020; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Sassler & Miller, 2017). When young adults delay marriage or choose not to marry at all, their relationship with their parents may strengthen due to burdens of marriage and family being eliminated (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008). During the partner selection process, parents may shape partner selection and can be looked at as the "third party" in romantic relationships,

driving endogamy among socioeconomic and other divisions (Kalmijn, 1998). Regarding education, parental involvement is also important, with financial, cultural, and social resources still having an impact (van Stee, 2022). Planning campus visits, gathering and explaining school information, attending college workshops, and helping with the application process are just a few examples of how parental involvement can improve in adulthood (Gast, 2021; Lareau & Weininger, 2008). As mentioned before, previous works mainly examine early childhood parental involvement. There needs to be more research on how parental involvement impacts higher education and adulthood, because it is still relevant to the topic and can add more variety to pre-existing research.

The significance of culture, socioeconomic status, family, and teacher relations, as well as age progression are all important aspects of parental involvement.

Data and Methodology

Instrument

A survey questionnaire was created by 10 members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation team at Longwood University. The survey consisted of 14 questions, 11 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 the Qualtrics system. Head Start teachers e-mailed links to the survey to parents or 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 the children to be done with their parent or guardian. The Sensory Writing Bag was to be filled with shaving cream and children were to write numbers, letters (specifically their name), and animals that helped demonstrate fine motor skills. Teachers sent a reminder e-mail to parents or guardians to complete any outstanding surveys. This resulted in 15 surveys 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 (15 from 2023, 20 from 2022, and 42 from 2019).

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis of the completed surveys is based on the close-ended questions. For this study, the dependent variable is family involvement. The item from the survey that was used to operationalize this was, “On a scale from 0 to 10, did this activity encourage your family to work together?” (0=not at all, 10=a great amount). The independent variable is whether or not the child lives in a single-parent household. This is operationalized using the item “Does your child live in a single-parent household?”. Answer choices for this item are “Yes”, “No”, and “Prefer not to say”. 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 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 reoccurring themes in the participants’ responses.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

Family Fun Time Activities from 2019, 2022, and 2023 produce a mean of 9.5 overall for enjoyment. This means that families fairly enjoy the activities. A mean of 7.2 ($SD = 2.8$) is found for involvement. This indicates that families are relatively involved in the activity with their child. Table 1 demonstrates this information.

Table 1
Mean & Standard Deviation of Family Involvement

Involvement	
Mean	7.2
Standard Deviation	2.8

When looking at single parent-households, 26% of respondents said “yes” to being a part of a single parent household. 70% of respondents said “no” to being in a single parent household. However, 4% did not respond to the question.

When looking at individual activities, there are few survey responses, with the average response rate being 20%. This could be caused by expanding the participant pool too far, an unknown number of siblings in the household, or the new method of survey distribution (online rather than paper). The Haunted Runway activity received one out of 17 survey responses, totaling family involvement to a mean of 9 and enjoyment to a mean of 10. The respondent was a white single mother. The Clothespin Counting Wheel received two out of 17 responses, with an 11% response rate. The mean for involvement is 8.5 and the mean for enjoyment is 10. One respondent is a white mother in a two-parent household, and one is an African American mother in a single-parent household. The Sensory Writing Bag Activity received three out of 17 responses with a 17% response rate. The mean of involvement is 9.6 and the mean of enjoyment is 10. The Scavenger Hunt and Leaf Rubbing activity received

one out of 17 responses, with an involvement mean of 10 and enjoyment mean of 10. The respondent is African American from a single-parent household. The Counting Caterpillars received six out of 17 responses, with a 42.86% response rate. The mean for involvement is 7.3 while the mean of enjoyment is 8.6. Overall, families were involved in the activities with their children and enjoyed participating in the activities together.

Qualitative Findings

Family fun time activities exemplified three themes: children were able to learn and practice more through these activities, parent(s) enjoyed participating in the activity with their child and doing the activity together, and fine motor skills, like cutting paper, gluing, new skills, etc., being incorporated into the child's development. These surveys were analyzed from Head Start and Andy Taylor Center.

Parental Participation

Out of sixteen responses, thirteen discussed enjoyments in participating in the activities with their children and being able to do them together as a family. Respondent fifteen responded with "Yes, he enjoyed making the finger friends the most. Spending time together doing something educational is always fun. 'Family Time'". This demonstrates that both parent and child find it enjoyable to learn something educational and beneficial. Respondent ten states that they enjoyed "Doing them together. [Child's name] says she loves doing things with mom and dad." Respondent five also says "It's fun when you want to do something fun & enjoyable for kids & family." Family enjoyment is extremely important amongst the information provided in these surveys. Another response addressing the family having a good time was respondent eight, which said "Seeing her helping me with the activities and having a good time." Overall, family enjoyment was prevalent in the completion of these activities.

Learning and Practicing Material

The second theme prevalent throughout the surveys was learning and practicing. Out of sixteen responses, ten mentioned new material that their child learned from participating in these five activities. Respondents one and six said that their children learned how to follow instructions. Another survey proving that children were learning from these activities was number eight, which stated that this activity helped their child with “knowing more items.” Respondent nine made the point that their child specifically learned “letters, numbers, how to take turns.” Multiple surveys provided results which said their children learned colors and shapes, which were respondents five, eleven, and twelve. Finally, respondent sixteen provided a detailed response which said, “My son learned different techniques from the activity that he can apply to real life.” Not only are these children learning the basics for their age groups, but they are also learning skills that will help them throughout their lives beyond the activities. Overall, these family fun time activities were able to teach children new skills or material that they had not yet known while also allowing them to practice in order to improve their knowledge.

Fine Motor Skills

The final theme that was prevalent in these surveys was children were able to learn and improve fine motor skills, which came from five survey results. Respondent one said their child “Practiced cutting with scissors.” Fine motor skills are difficult to learn as a child and these children got much needed practice in. Respondent two said “[Child’s name] learn[ed] how to cut and glue. And how to trace better.” Another response that incorporated both family enjoyment and fine motor skills was respondent six, saying “She loved cutting & gluing, she loved making stuff & jumping with everyone.” This is explaining how the child was enjoying time with family while learning fine motor skills. Overall, children’s fine motor skills improved throughout these activities.

Head Start and Andy Taylor center families submitted these surveys, and this data was analyzed. Throughout the data from these surveys, the most common themes were parental participation with children in these activities, children learning new concepts and being able to practice them for skills later in life, and them being able to incorporate fine motor skills into everyday life.

Discussion

In this study, members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation investigated if Family Fun Time Activities improve family involvement. Previous research suggests that family involvement in a child's life is crucial in order to develop academic and behavioral skills. Qualitative results produced three themes: children were able to learn and practice more through these activities, parent(s) enjoyed participating in the activity with their child, and fine motor skills, like cutting paper, gluing, new skills, etc., being incorporated into the child's development. Quantitative results produced strong results that family involvement was evident in these activities. Overall, the results supported the research question that suggests Family Fun Time Activities improve family involvement in a child's life.

References

- Ansari, A., & Gershoff, E. (2015). Parent involvement in head start and children's development: Indirect effects through parenting. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78(2), 562–579. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12266>
- Auerbach, S. (2006). "If the student is good, let him fly": Moral support for college among Latino immigrant parents. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 5(4), 275–292. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532771xjle0504_4
- Auerbach, S. (2007). From moral supporters to struggling advocates: Reconceptualizing parent roles in education through the experience of working-class families of color. *Urban Education*, 42(3), 250–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085907300433>
- Castellanos, J., Herrera, N., Gloria, A. M., Kanagui-Munoz, M., & Flores, C. (2013). How Mexican parents' college knowledge, perceptions, and concerns influence the emotional and behavioral support of their children to pursue higher education: ¡Apoyamos la educacion de Nuestros Hija/os. *The Journal of Latino-Latin American Studies*, 5(2), 85+–98. Gale General OneFile. <https://doi.org/10.18085/llas.5.2.8xn051203217v35g>

- Cherlin, A. J. (2020). Degrees of change: An assessment of the Deinstitutionalization of marriage thesis. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(1), 62–80.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12605>
- DeLuca, S., Clampet-Lundquist, S., & Edin, K. (2016). *Coming of age in the other America*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Edin, K., & Kefalas, M. (2005). *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage*. University of California Press.
- Gast, M. J. (2021). Reconceptualizing college knowledge: Class, race, and Black students in a college-counseling field. *Sociology of Education*, 95(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00380407211046053>
- Hardie, J. H. (2015). The best laid plans: Social capital in the development of girls' educational and occupational plans. *Social Problems*, 62(2), 241–265.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spv003>
- Kalmijn, M. (1998). Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, patterns, trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24(1), 395–421. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.395>
- Lareau, A., & Cox, A. (2011). Social class and the transition to adulthood. In M. J. Carlson & P. England (Eds.), *Social class and changing families in an unequal America* (pp. 134–164). Stanford University Press.
- Lareau, A., & Weininger, E. B. (2008). Class and the transition to adulthood. In A. Lareau & D. Conley (Eds.), *Social class: How does it work?* (pp. 118–151). Russell Sage Foundation.

- McWayne, C., Hampton, V., Fantuzzo, J., Cohen, H. L., & Sekino, Y. (2004). A multivariate examination of parent involvement and the social and academic competencies of Urban Kindergarten Children. *Psychology in the Schools, 41*(3), 363–377.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.10163>
- Napolitano, L., Pacholok, S., & Furstenberg, F. F. (2014). Educational aspirations, expectations, and realities for middle-income families. *Journal of Family Issues, 35*(9), 1200–1226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13479334>
- Núñez, J. C., Freire, C., Ferradás, M. del Valle, A., & Xu, J. (2021). Perceived parental involvement and student engagement with homework in secondary school: The mediating role of self-handicapping. *Current Psychology, 42*(6), 4350–4361.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01791-8>
- Parmar, P.; Nathans, L. Parental Warmth and Parent Involvement: Their Relationships to Academic Achievement and Behavior Problems in School and Related Gender Effects. *Societies 2022, 12*, 161. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc12060161>
- Perrigo, J. L., Hurlburt, M., Harris, T., Villamil Grest, C., Borja, J., & Samek, A. (2022). A qualitative methods approach to reimagine education-related parental involvement among low–socioeconomic status families. *Children & Schools, 44*(4), 224–235.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdac020>
- Previ, B., Napolitano, L., Meloy, M., & Curtis, K. (2020). Pathways into college and away from crime: Perspectives of Black and Latino/a youth growing up in single-mother households in one of America’s most dangerous cities. *Children and Youth Services Review, 108*, 104561. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104561>

Sarkisian, N., & Gerstel, N. (2008). Till marriage do us part: Adult children's relationships with their parents. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(2), 360–376.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00487.x>

Sassler, S., & Miller, A. J. (2017). *Cohabitation nation: Gender, class, and the remaking of relationships*. University of California Press.

van Stee, E. G. (2022). Parenting young adults across social class: A review and synthesis.

Sociology Compass, 16(9). <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.13021>