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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Sandra Scruggs Wilson entitled "A Comparison of Self-Reported Parenting Behaviors for an At-Risk Group and a Group Not Identified to be At-Risk." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

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We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
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A Comparison of Self-Reported Parenting Behaviors for an At-Risk Group and a Group Not Identified to be At-Risk

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated

to

my parents and grandparents

who

were my first teachers.

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Abstract

There is much interest in parenting styles and child behaviors. This study was conducted to identify parenting behaviors that are associated with high risk for child abuse and neglect. Two groups of parents answered questions on the Home Environment Profile (HEP) and their answers were compared. One group of parents was identified to be at-risk for child abuse and/or neglect and met criteria for a child abuse prevention program. The other group was not identified to be at-risk. Analysis of the groups' self-reported parenting behaviors found significant differences in the demographic information and in the area of parenting behaviors labeled consistency. No significant differences were found for the factors labeled communication and rewards. Findings from this study suggest that parenting education programs should include components on consistency, structure, and parental self-management as well as ways to work through concomitant concerns such as low income level and lack of formal education.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Much has been written about parenting styles and behaviors. Our society is interested in determining what constitutes good parenting skills and how we can produce children who will grow to be independent, responsible, and contributing members of society. Questions are being directed to experts as to why some children and adolescents in America are taking up weapons and destroying their friends, their families, and themselves. A child's home environment is one area we can observe to find the factors leading to inappropriate child and adolescent behavior. This study looked at self-reported parental attitudes and behaviors that make up the general home environment.

Parenting behaviors associated with positive outcomes for children include communication, encouragement, consistency, structure, rewards, and incentives. Positive parent-child interactions are usually characterized by communication and encouragement. Consistency and structure in the home are also linked to adaptive functioning. Rewards and incentives are often effective in eliciting and reinforcing desired behaviors from children. The literature discusses styles of parenting that include these components. For example, an authoritative parenting style is supported by the literature. This parental style consists of warmth, encouragement, and clear limits. Positive correlations have been found between authoritative parenting and academic achievement, better child coping, and peer acceptance.

Quality of parenting is frequently defined in terms of parent-child interactions. Better developmental outcomes are associated with parental communication and encouragement. Parents who are positive and supportive have infants who are less inhibited, preschoolers who appear more competent, and adolescents with higher self-esteem and more self-confidence. Positive relationships with adults are associated with higher academic performance across all age groups.

Consistency and structure are needed within the home environment to prevent chaos. A disorganized or chaotic home environment increases the risk for deviant development. Parents who are organized and self-managed tend to have children who are self-managed. Children with self-management skills tend to do better in school. Parent education programs have been developed utilizing key components of self-management such as setting schedules, modeling appropriate behaviors, and monitoring activities.

Rewards and incentives have been found effective in eliciting desired behaviors from children. Some controversy exists about the use of tangible reinforcement. In general, studies have shown that contingency contracts have increased desired behaviors in both the home and the school environments. However, undesirable results may occur when reinforcement is used incorrectly.

Factors such as socioeconomic status, parent's educational level, and the age of the parent when the child was born all play a part in the general home environment. Low income is linked to poor child outcomes in the areas of

development, social functioning, and academics. Mothers with low income are more susceptible to depression and depressed mothers are at higher risk for negative parenting behaviors toward their children. Parents' educational level is related to parental involvement, which in turn is related to academic performance. Good parenting practices can help children achieve school success even when the parent's educational level is low.

Stress has been associated with negative parenting behaviors and less than optimal home environments. Stress in the home environment can have many different causes. Sources of stress may include marital discord, divorce, poverty, or psychopathology. Economic stress has a negative effect on children's self-esteem, peer relationships, and behavior. During marital conflict fathers tend to behave more negatively toward their daughters. Divorced parents have adolescent children who tend to be more externalizing. Psychopathology falls outside the normal range of stressors. Chronic depression, conduct disorder, and antisocial personality disorder have been shown to have a negative effect on parenting behaviors and the general home environment.

Everyday stressors can be as negative or worse than a major life stressor. Daily stressors have predicted psychological symptoms, family states, and interactions. As family hassles increase, parental irritability and social aggression in children increase. Co-parenting can decrease and parental differences increase in

times of stress. Children in families troubled by stress tend to have greater externalizing problems.

This study asked the question: what parenting behaviors are associated with a high risk for child abuse and neglect? When parents are considered at-risk for child abuse or neglect, certain behaviors may be present in the parent's repertoire or in the home environment while other parental behaviors may be lacking. For the purpose of this study a subset of test items from the Home Environment Profile (HEP) was chosen relating to the area of parenting skills that form the construct of parental modeling and teaching behaviors.

This study consisted of two samples. One sample of parent surveys was collected from 137 parents from four different states, who chose to participate in a research project when asked to do so by their child's school. A second sample was collected from 32 parents participating in a child abuse prevention program provided by a private not-for-profit social services agency after having met the criteria for being at-risk for abusive and/or neglectful behavior toward their child. The HEP was utilized. This instrument asks parents to answer questions about their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors they demonstrate in their home environment when dealing with their child/children. The original HEP consists of eighty-one questions/demographic items. A subset of twenty-one items and three demographic questions was used for this study.

The answers provided by the parents from the two samples were compared on the specific parental constructs defined for the purpose of this study. The computer program SPSS was utilized to analyze the data collected. Demographics were utilized as descriptive data to show how the two groups differ. The self-reported parental behaviors identified as factors for this study were compared using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). One way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to discover where differences occurred. Spearman correlations were utilized to discover general trends in the data.

Twenty-eight test items were identified that relate to the construct of parental modeling or teaching. A factor analysis was run on these items that resulted in twenty test items forming a rotated factor matrix consisting of three main factors. The first factor included ten test items related to the construct of parental communication and encouragement. The second factor included eight test items related to the construct of parental consistency and structure. The third factor included two test items related to the construct of parental rewards and incentives.

A MANOVA comparing responses on the three factors for the two groups found one significant difference. One way ANOVAs found no differences for parental communication and encouragement or parental rewards and incentives. A significant difference was found in parental consistency and structure.

A MANOVA indicated significant differences among the three factors with regard to income level. The one way ANOVAs found no significant difference in

the area of parental communication and encouragement, but significant differences were found in the areas of parental consistency and structure and parental rewards and incentives.

A MANOVA indicated significant differences among the three factors with regard to the parent's educational level. The one way ANOVAs found no significant difference for parental rewards and incentives, but significant differences were found for parental communication and encouragement and parental consistency and structure.

A MANOVA indicated significant differences among the three factors with regard to the age of the parent when the child was born. The one way ANOVAs found no significant differences for parental communication and encouragement or parental rewards and incentives, but a significant difference was found for parental consistency and structure.

A chi-square analysis found significant differences between the two groups with regard to the general level of stress reported. The Agency group reported higher levels of stress than did the Non-Agency group. The MANOVA indicated no significant differences among the three factors with regard to the general level of stress reported by the parent.

A Spearman correlation was run on the demographic information and produced moderate correlation coefficients for all three items (annual income, educational level, and age of parent at birth of child). A logistic regression analysis

was performed to see if group membership could be predicted according to the three factors or the demographic information. Of the six variables in the equation only income and age were found to be significant predictors. However, this may not be a good predictive model since under two-thirds of the Agency were predicted correctly. This could have been due to the small sample size of the Agency group and unequal group sizes overall.

This study compared two very different groups of parents. One group was identified to be at-risk for child abuse or neglect while the other group was not identified to be at-risk. Demographics of the two groups differed greatly, as well. The two groups differed on self-reported parenting behaviors in the factor labeled consistency for this study. When the three factors (communication, consistency, and rewards) were compared based on annual income, consistency increased as income increased and rewards decreased as income increased. When the three factors were compared based on parent's educational level, communication and consistency increased as parent's educational level increased. When the three factors were compared based on the parent's age at the birth of the child, consistency increased as the parent's age at the birth of the child increased. Income and age may not be a good predictive model for the Agency group since only 63.16% were correctly predicted. This may have been due to the small size of the Agency group and the unequal sizes of both groups.

Findings from this study are consistent with current research that holds that consistency and structure in the home environment are necessary for good developmental outcomes for children. Findings were also consistent concerning parent's educational level. The educational level of the parent is related to parental involvement and child wellbeing. Findings from this study were not consistent with previous research in regard to the stress level in the home. Although the perceived level of stress was reported to be much higher by the Agency group than the Non-Agency group the stress did not appear to affect reported parenting behaviors in the three areas studied.

Certain limitations should be taken into account when considering the findings of the present study. A self-report instrument was used and social desirability is considered a limitation of any self-report instrument. The two groups were not random samples of parents and the size of the two groups was not comparable. The Non-Agency group had 137 participants compared to the Agency group, which had 32 participants. Results may have been more meaningful if the Agency group had been larger and if there was more demographic overlap between the two groups.

Further research would be helpful to determine if parenting education and parent skills training programs can successfully teach parental behaviors such as consistency and structure. Parent training programs might benefit from including

self-management components aimed at the parents themselves. Pre- and post-tests would be helpful in documenting change due to intervention strategies.

Teaching parenting skills that emphasize consistency and structure in the home environment seems to be indicated by this study. Of the three pieces of demographic information looked at (annual income, parent's educational level, and parent's age at the birth of the child) the only one that cannot be changed is the age of the parent at the birth of the child. Teen pregnancy prevention programs are aimed at this target population. Intervention strategies for at-risk parents should include GED classes, vocational or job training, and placement. Educational and career counseling should be a part of the intervention program to enable parents to enumerate their options and choose a plan of action to improve their lives as well as the lives of their children.

It should be acknowledged that some parents may not be able to improve as much as one might hope due to lack of cognitive ability. Programs should be made available that provide continued home visitation and support to these parents. This would offer a way to monitor the home and ensure the developmental progress of the child. Parent education should be taught at the necessary level for maximum understanding.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Background

Many studies have tried to determine the parenting styles or behaviors in the home environment that produce the best outcomes for child development. Humans are born helpless and require total care in the early stages of development. The infant must rely on an older person to meet his needs for survival and to provide responses that are predictable and dependable. As this dependent relationship develops, social and psychological attachment occurs between the child and the caregiver (Solnit, 1984).

Parenting behaviors exhibited in the home environment are affected by many variables. At-risk home environments are often characterized by drug or alcohol abuse, lack of parenting skills, poverty, stress, or lack of social support.

Parents also bring personal limitations with them into the home environment. Parents learn what they know about parenting from their childhood experiences and other observational learning (Bandura, 1977). Parents often parent their children like they were parented whether their parental model was appropriate or not. Adults who were abused as children may have difficulty parenting their own children because of their experience of childhood trauma (Solnit, 1984). Parental beliefs can have a subtle cumulative effect on parent-child interactions although they are unseen by direct observation (McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 1985). Children also bring their

vulnerabilities into the home environment. Bell (1968) first identified the phenomenon of the parent influencing the child and the child influencing the parent. This reciprocity makes it more difficult to isolate determining factors in parenting styles and the resulting child development. Most parents with more than one child admit that they parent their children differently. They have learned that what "works" for one child may not "work" for another.

The physician, Albert J. Solnit (1984) suggested that individuals cope with situations differently. Parents and children both bring strengths and weaknesses into the parent-child interaction. One parent dealing with the situation of a fussy infant may feel confident and competent to soothe and meet the infant's needs while another parent may feel threatened and tense producing an interaction that exacerbates the infant's mood and eventually leads to child abuse (Solnit, 1984).

Positive Parenting

Parenting style has an influence on behavior and academic performance. An "authoritative" parenting style associated with parental warmth, encouragement, and clear limits is supported by the literature (Clark, 1983). Authoritative parenting not only increases prosocial behavior and decreases conduct problems in adolescents in the home, but also in the adolescent's friends (Fletcher, Darling, Dornbusch, & Steinberg, 1995). The strength of the authoritative style appears to be the combination of positive interactions with appropriate discipline. In order for parents

to be effective, they must be able to emotionally engage their children, encourage them and choose appropriate guidance and discipline. Authoritative parenting has been shown to correlate positively with academic achievement (Dornbush, Ritter, Leiderman Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987), better child coping (Dusek & Danko, 1994), and peer acceptance (Isley, O'Neil, & Parke, 1996). In a study conducted by Chao (1996), mothers expressed that they believed their children would do better in school if they as parents validated their child's curiosity, encouraged their ideas, provided a "warm and loving environment," and gave them "loads of praise and positive reinforcement" (p. 417).

Individual components of authoritative parenting include parental warmth, or acceptance, psychological autonomy, and behavioral control. Authoritative parenting has been described as a combination of parental demands and parental responsiveness (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts (1989) explained the link between authoritative parenting and academic success in terms of autonomy, which they defined in terms of self-reliance, identity, and self-direction. Children of authoritative parents were able to significantly delay gratification longer than children of authoritarian parents as demonstrated in a study conducted by Reitman and Gross (1997). In another study Baumrind (1989) found these children to be less likely to develop substance abuse problems.

There is a wealth of data supporting the view that quality of parenting affects child behavior (Baumrind, 1993). Quality of parenting can be measured in different

ways; interactions, attitudes, involvement, and parent styles have all been studied. Positive interactions between parent and child appear to be particularly important. Infants with parents who are positive and supportive are less inhibited (Park, Belsky, Putnam, & Crnic, 1997). Preschoolers with parents who are positive and reciprocal in their interactions appear more competent (Dumas & LaFrentiere, 1993). Adolescents who perceive their parents as positive in verbal interaction have higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence (Blake & Slate, 1993).

Bronstein, et al. (1996) described parenting and family behaviors that predict middle school adjustment. Although their sample was limited to Caucasians, 81% of whom were married, they found that children of parents whose parenting style was supportive and aware had positive academic, social, and psychological adjustment in fifth grade that further improved in the seventh grade. Furthermore, parental inattentiveness and harsh control were associated with poor fifth grade outcomes and a decline in adjustment over time.

Positive relationships with adults (Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa & Turbin, 1995), and parental involvement and encouragement (Steinberg, Lumborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992) are associated with higher academic performance across all ages. Social acceptance in the classroom and coping are related to parental warmth and affection (Isley, et al. 1996; Dusek & Danko, 1994) while parental hostility is associated with decreased academic performance (Melby & Conger, 1996). Martini (1995) found that specific parenting practices such as extensive

involvement with children, microstructuring of children's development, and democratic parenting correlated strongly with school success even when socioeconomic status, parent intelligence, parent education, family size, and the child's position in the family were controlled for.

Melby and Conger (1996) proposed dynamic interdependence between parental and adolescent behaviors. Their research looked at the parental management behaviors that included: 1) the parent setting standards for appropriate behavior, 2) monitoring adherence to or violations of these standards, 3) providing positive consequences for desired behavior through ongoing exchange. Additional measures of the construct (parental childrearing behaviors) reflected the use of praise, approval, rewards, and special privileges in response to behavior that met parental standards. Other items that were evaluated consisted of: 1) participating in activities that provide opportunities for conversation, companionship, and mutual enjoyment, 2) demonstrating knowledge of the child's activities and friends, 3) setting age appropriate standards, 4) guiding the behavior of the child through an ongoing exchange of information, and 5) encouraging the adolescent's thought and consideration regarding the reasons for rules and expectations. Hostile parenting behaviors such as interacting with the adolescent in an angry or hostile manner were also measured. Each behavior mentioned was evaluated by the adolescent, the parent, or an outside observer and judged on a Likert scale. Academic success was measured by grade point average as reported in the child's school records. The

results of this study indicate that setting and positively reinforcing appropriate behavior standards increases academic performance, whereas hostility decreases academic performance.

Consistency and structure within the home environment also have an effect on child development. Given structure and support by an older person or parent, a child can progress to perform at a higher level (Vygotsky, 1978). If the environment provided to a child by his parents and in which he develops, is not well managed or organized, the child may not have the environmental reinforcement to develop and/or maintain appropriate adaptive behavior. If the home environment is chaotic or disorganized the risk for deviant development is high (Solnit, 1984). Examples of disorganization may include out-of-wedlock births or families dealing with poverty or psychopathology. Difficult environmental demands lead to the development of different patterns of ability. Those children who do well in school seem to have the ability to self-manage. One of the meta-cognitive tools taught to students not experiencing academic success is self-management (Dickinson, 1993). Mothers involved in Chao's (1996) study shared the belief that fostering a child's school success requires consistency and structure within the home environment. They explained that this will help the child "adapt to other environments outside the home" (Chao, 1996, p. 417).

A few parent education programs have been developed under the assumption that both parental involvement and parental self-management are related to a child's

academic success. Tactics for Improving Parenting Skills (TIPS) is a program designed to improve parenting skills (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1995). One of its informational leaflets, Education in the Home, stresses that home and family environments have a major impact on children's educational achievements. Parents can make the home educationally stimulating and conducive to educational success. Some of the ways listed to assist children are 1) help your child/children create and keep schedules, 2) set a good example for your child/children, and 3) monitor recreational activities. These behaviors and benefits may influence a child if they are first evidenced in the life of the parent or someone close enough to provide a status model. Chao (1996) studied a sample of 48 immigrant Chinese and 50 European American mothers of preschoolers and perspectives regarding the role of parenting in their children's school success. "Some of the Chinese mothers said their children do well simply because the parents themselves are outstanding" (p. 411).

In a qualitative study of the self-management skills in an adolescent with Down's syndrome, Richardson, Kline, and Huber (1996) describe how the family, school, and community contributed to the development of such skills. The study is based on Vygotsky's theory of social learning and describes how this young woman's environment assisted her. According to the participant's grandfather, "She has had constant supervision, correction, reward, and punishment" (p. 296). The authors concluded that for this child, "As for a primary and continuous training, for mental skills, as one might expect, the family and home must be given the most

credit. Sandy's mother has provided BOTH modeling and direct instruction to hone Sandy's mental development" (p. 299).

Parent training programs can facilitate increased parental self-management and appear to be most effective when implemented early in a child's life (Williams, Williams and McLaughlin, 1991). The parenting environment is enhanced when parents utilize self-management procedures to plan and monitor parental behaviors in the home environment (Williams, et al. 1991). Parental self-management is necessary to provide consistent rules and consequences in the home environment. In homes of behavior disordered children, the number of vague or interrupted parental requests served as a predictor of the child's non-compliance (Wells and Forehand, 1981). Sanders (1982) demonstrated that self-management training for parents increased the accuracy of specific parenting behaviors and the behavior was generalized across different settings. Unfortunately, not all parents are interested in or capable of learning about parenting skills or child development (Barrera & Rosenbaum, 1986).

Barrera and Rosenbaum (1986) conducted a home intervention program study that included 1) clinical assessment of the home environment and 2) individual program plans that consisted of documenting family strengths and needs and short-term as well as long-term goals. Educational services were provided through home visiting therapists working with parents and children to attain the goals and objectives set forth in the family's individual program plan. Preliminary findings

suggested that their educational problem-solving model had benefits for families in the program.

Rewards and incentives have often been utilized by adults to gain desired behaviors from children. Arguments have been presented for and against this type of practice (Chance, 1992). Results of a study conducted by Susan Smith (1994) in a New Jersey school system suggest that contingency contracting significantly improved school-related behaviors in a group of elementary school children. The program was developed to increase cooperation between the home and the school, provide parenting skills training, and improve student's school behavior. Crucial elements of the program included goals that were well-defined and measurable with consistent rewards and positive reinforcement for the child. Parents noticed improved constructive communication with their children as a result of the program.

Parenting involves an interactive combination of affective, cognitive, and behavioral processes (Baumrind, 1966; Belsky, 1985; Crittenden, Partridge & Clauseen, 1992; Steinberg, et al. 1992). Parents must relate emotionally to their children, monitor behavior, discipline, guide, and provide encouragement and assistance. Parents must also process volumes of information to make decisions. These tasks must be accomplished in the context of a family with other demands and can be a source of stress (Conger, Patterson, & Ge, 1995; Pearlin & Turner, 1987). Not all parents perform equally well at juggling these demands.

At-Risk Parenting

Home environments that are considered to be at-risk for child abuse and/or child neglect often include more than one risk factor. These risk factors can precipitate certain parental behaviors. Although studies have tried to tease out the characteristics of abusers, conclusive evidence of an offender profile has not been documented (Milner & Murphy, 1995). Studies have discussed parenting styles and behaviors as falling on a continuum from harsh to empathetic (Jackson, et al. 1999). Abusive behaviors fall at the extreme end of the continuum. Child abuse includes any behavior that causes harm to the child and may occur in different spheres of the child's life. Physical abuse involves physical harm to the child. Emotional abuse involves behaviors such as name-calling and other inappropriate responses from parents during parent-child interactions. Neglect includes a lack of parental response in meeting a child's physical or emotional needs. Different parenting interactions fall up and down the continuum. When dealing with their children in different situations, parents may use strategies that are at different places on the continuum. For example, a mother may deal with her child appropriately at home but "loose her cool" in the grocery store when she is feeling hurried and the child is not cooperating.

Some studies have suggested that all parents have the potential to be abusive (Jackson, et al. 1999; Cerezo & D'Ocon, 1999). High-risk homes have parents who use inappropriate parenting strategies with their children on a regular basis. Parent-

child interactions are more negative and the use of physical and verbal aggression is prevalent. At-risk home environments include inconsistent parental behaviors and lower levels of empathy displayed toward the child/children (Rosenstein, 1995). High-risk mothers engage in fewer neutral social interactions with their children than do low-risk mothers. Abusive mothers are more inconsistent in their responses to their children's behavior (Dolz, Cerezo, & Milner, 1997). Some at-risk homes are characterized by parent-child relationships in which the parent believes the child is there to meet his/her needs instead of the other way around (Rosenstein, 1995). Often these homes are characterized by one or more of the following risk factors, although this list is not exhaustive:

- poverty
- lack of social support
- low educational levels
- adolescent parenting
- lack of understanding concerning child development
- depression
- drug or alcohol abuse
- lack of coping skills
- unrealistic expectations for children
- lack of resources
- lack of parenting skills

- several young children in the home

Many such lists have been published and utilized for assessment and intervention purposes (Burrell, Thompson, & Sexton, 1994; Dukewich, Borkowski, & Whitman, 1999; Kotch, Browne, Dufort, Winsor, & Catellier, 1999; Landy & Munro, 1998). According to Burrell et al. (1994) stress related to parenting is a correlate of child abuse potential. Limited family resources may induce stress for some mothers and thereby lead to potential child abuse. However, other mothers can effectively cope with deficient resources because of their own perceptions of those resources and their ability to manage.

Many programs that have attempted to help at-risk parents to improve their parenting strategies and home environments have difficulty establishing trust with at-risk families (Landy & Munro, 1998). These families usually have had a history with state departments and social workers and sometimes feel threatened by social services involvement.

One study (Whipple, 1999) tested the effectiveness of parent education and support programs aimed at meeting the needs of maltreating and at-risk families. The HOPE (Help Ourselves Parent Effectively) group received instruction on positive parenting techniques, child development, and stress management; but the schedule was ongoing and the participants attended as they desired. There were no significant positive changes in behaviors perhaps due to the sporadic attendance of the participants. The program was designed to allow parents to determine their level

of involvement. Parents heard about the program, enrolled, and attendance was up to the individual. Also, in this study was a Parent Nurturing Program that emphasized training in positive parenting techniques, stress management, and expressing emotions. This program consisted of twelve sessions meeting two hours per week. Results were positive with reported reduced stress, increased ability to negotiate conflicts, and decreased verbal aggression. Findings support a more intensive and structured program over a longer period of time as being more successful. According to Whipple (1999), some of the most successful intervention programs have used a home visitation model. Home visitation programs typically involve workers visiting in the homes bringing informational booklets and videotapes on child development, parenting strategies, health and nutritional guidelines, and numerous other topics for parent education and instruction. The workers are there to provide direct instruction as well as informal counseling for the parent. Workers also provide information concerning community resources that can help meet the family's material needs.

Socioeconomic Factors

Low socioeconomic status has been described as a factor that contributes to poor child developmental, social, and academic outcomes. Coontz (1995) stated that "poverty - often a preexisting condition of single parenthood - accounts for more than half the disadvantages of single-parent families" (p. K11). Furthermore, women

of very low socioeconomic status appear to be highly susceptible to depression after giving birth (Lyons-Ruth, Zoll, Connell, & Grunebaum, 1986). Lyons-Ruth and her colleagues looked at depression in low-income mothers and its effect on the child's environment and parent-child interaction. They concluded that depressive symptoms were prevalent among lower class mothers and that depressed mothers engaged in more maladaptive parental behaviors in the home environment. Interestingly, a strong relationship was not found between the father's behaviors and the child's adjustment in this study.

Behavioral problems and developmental delays are thought to be prevalent among children of very young mothers (Whiteside-Mansell, Pope, & Bradley, 1996). The factors of parental age and educational level easily become muddled for the purposes of research. Many times a teenage girl who becomes pregnant does not complete high school and therefore is unable to attain gainful employment to provide economically for herself and her infant. The majority of single mothers complete only high school and live at or near the national poverty level (Coontz, 1995). In many cases being forced to live on government assistance automatically places the family below the poverty level. Given this set of circumstances, it is not unusual for depression or depressive symptoms to occur as a result of the life circumstances of the young mother. Rutter (1979) found that the presence of multiple risk factors had a multiplicative rather than an additive effect for negative child outcomes.

Cherniss and Herzog (1996) conducted an evaluation of a home-based family therapy program for disadvantaged adolescent mothers. Intensive educational services were provided in the home to the teenaged mother as well as the other family members living in the home. Involving the extended family increased the benefits of the program by increasing environmental and psychological support. Evaluation findings after twelve months indicated that these families were less dependent on government assistance and had improved parental behaviors with their children.

Parent's educational level also affects parenting behaviors. Maternal educational level was found to have more impact on child wellbeing than marital status (Coontz, 1995). Melby and Conger (1996) found that parental educational level was related to parental involvement, which was then related to academic performance. In a study to assess differences between children of alcoholics and their peers, Havey and Dodd (1995) found that children of alcoholics were less likely to live with both parents and their parent's educational level was more likely to fall below college attendance. They also found that children of alcoholics reported home environments that were distinguished by less cohesion, more conflict, and more bad events.

Stress

Parenting is a complex process that may deteriorate during periods of stress. Crnic and Greenberg (1990) found that higher levels of stress were associated with "less optimal parenting and family functioning, fewer optimal parent-child interactions and lower child developmental competence" (p.1628). Economics, relationships, and parental psychopathology have all been associated with poorer parenting and child outcomes (Conger et al., 1995; D'Angelo, Weinburger, & Feldman, 1995; Dix, 1991; Goldsmith & Ragoff, 1995; Hetherington, 1993; Patterson, 1983; Teti, Messinger & Gelfand, 1995). Numerous low-level stressors can also cumulatively create a highly stressful home situation.

Conger et al. (1995) determined that parental depression over economic difficulties led to poor parenting and marital conflict. Bolger, Peterson, Thompson, and Kupersmidt's (1995) work suggests that the more enduring the economic stress, the greater the negative effect on children in terms of self-esteem, peer relationships, and behavior. Parental involvement, especially from the mother, mediates effects of stress. Howe (1994) also found for single mothers that the negative effect on children's peer status and prosocial behavior from economic difficulty was mediated by parental warmth and acceptance.

Not all stress is economic. Family conflict can also create stress. In a study of preschool children, Kerrig, Cowan, and Cowan (1993) found that patterns of interaction change in times of marital conflict with parents, especially fathers,

behaving more negatively toward their daughters. Mothers were not globally more negative with their sons but were more likely to reciprocate their sons' negativity and to negate their daughters' assertive actions. Jaycox and Repetti (1993) reported that children in fourth and fifth grades were less well adjusted when they were in a family high in conflict.

Another form of family stress is divorce. In studies of early adolescent children, Mavis Hetherington (1993) found that children were more externalizing and had a more tumultuous early adolescence if parents were divorced. She noted that parental variables such as authoritative parenting could modify the negative effects of divorce but that authoritative parenting was rarely found in her study. Kurdeck, Fine, and Sinclair (1994) also found that authoritative parenting can mediate the stressors of divorce and remarriage that were associated with poor child adjustment.

The presence of psychopathology falls outside the normal range of stressful events. Studies typically characterize these parents as distressed. If a parent has a psychological disorder, such as depression or an antisocial personality, the ability to adequately parent a child may be seriously compromised. Two diagnoses that have been researched are depression and conduct problems/antisocial disorder. Researchers have shown that attachment security is less in very young children with chronically depressed mothers (Teti et al., 1995), that depressed mothers are less sensitive to their five and six-year-olds (Goldsmith and Ragoff, 1995) and that more

helplessness is seen in five to seven-year-olds of depressed mothers (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wolfson, Mumme & Guskin, 1995).

The research on conduct disorder/antisocial disorder indicates that parents with poor self-restraint have difficulty teaching their children self-restraint. D'Angelo, Weinberger, and Feldman (1995) found that adolescents whose fathers exhibited low self-restraint had lower academic achievement and poor peer relationships and were at-risk for antisocial conduct. It appears that "typical" stress affects parenting in that parents are less positive and supportive, but that parental "distress" may even further compromise parenting behaviors.

Many families do not experience a major life stressor or have a member with a psychopathology but experience the cumulative effect of everyday stressors (Crnic & Greenberg, 1987), creating a chronic state of stress that effects adaptive functioning (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer & Lazarus, 1981; Patterson, 1983). Kanner and his associates found that the frequency of daily hassles predicted psychological symptoms better than major negative life events. Crnic and Greenberg (1990) reported that minor daily stressors predicted family states and interactions and could contribute additively to major stress. Overall, hassled mothers were less satisfied and reported less functional families although community support and friendship were mediating factors. Patterson (1983) found increasing irritability in parents and social aggression in children as family hassles increased. Direct observation of mother-child dyads by Dumas (1986) indicated more aversive parental behavior

toward a child on days of high aversive contact with other adults, independent of the child's behavior. Supportive co-parenting can decrease and parental differences can increase during times of stress (Belsky, Crnic & Gable, 1995). Lastly, families who were identified as troubled, had children with greater externalizing problems and mothers with a higher rate of what they considered to be daily hassles.

Summary

Research has given us a picture of positive parenting. There is also ample evidence that parenting behaviors such as communication, nurturance, consistency, structure, and rewards for appropriate behavior are aspects of positive parenting that influence child outcomes.

In contrast to positive parenting is at-risk parenting. Some studies suggest that all parents may be at-risk for abusive behavior at times. However, certain personal and environmental factors increase the risk of abuse or neglect.

This study compared two very different samples of parents. The purpose of this study was to determine specific parenting behaviors associated with a high risk for child abuse or neglect. When parents are considered to be at-risk for child abuse or neglect certain behaviors may or may not be present in the parent's repertoire. This study used a self-report instrument to ascertain parental behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes demonstrated within the home environment.

Chapter Three

Methods and Procedures

Participants

The first sample of participants in this study were one hundred thirty-seven parents and caretakers (hereafter referred to as parents) from five school systems in four states. These were parents who were asked by their child's school to participate by filling out a Home Environment Profile (HEP). These schools agreed to participate with a research project conducted by the Psychoeducational Studies Unit in the College of Education at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

This first sample consisted of 137 participants including 85% mothers, 13% fathers, 1% foster parents and 2% grandparents. The distribution of annual family income was 3% below $10,000, 17% ranged from $10,000 to $25,000, 17% ranged from $26,000 to $40,000, 15% ranged from $41,000 to $55,000 and 48% made above $56,000 annually (see Table A-1, Appendix A). The highest level of education attained by the parent filling out the HEP was less than 1% elementary school or less, 3% junior high school, 43% high school, 40% college and 13% graduate school (see Table A-2). The age of the parent when the child was born was less than 1% age 15 or younger, 8% age 16 to 18, 13% age 19 to 22, 20% age 23 to 25, and 59% age 26 or older (see Table A-3). Of the sample, 88% were married,

10% were divorced, 1% were separated and 2% were widowed. (Due to missing data and rounding procedures these percentages do not always equal 100%.)

The second sample of participants were a group of thirty-two parents identified to be at-risk according to the State of Tennessee Department of Children's Services criteria for child abuse or neglect. The contributing risk factors may include (but are not limited to) poverty, age of parents, single parenting, substandard housing, drug or alcohol abuse, loss of a job, lack of parenting skills, or illness in the home. Participants were identified to be at-risk by social workers employed by the Department of Children's Services and were referred for home-based support services provided through a local not-for-profit social services agency. The agency provides parent education and support services through grant funding from the State of Tennessee. The HEP was included in the grant evaluation plan as a diagnostic tool for families participating in the agency's Child Abuse Prevention program. Permission to utilize the data collected through the Child Abuse Prevention program was requested and granted from the agency's Executive Director and Board Chairman and members of the Board of Directors.

This second sample consisted of 32 participants including 88% mothers, 6% fathers, 3% sister/brothers, and 3% grandparents. The distribution of annual family income was 72% below $10,000, 14% ranged from $10,000 to $25,000, and 13% ranged from $26,000 to $40,000 (see Table A-1). The highest level of education attained by the parent was 10% elementary school, 39% junior high school, 42%

high school, 7% college, and 3% graduate school (see Table A-2). The age of the parent when the child was born was 3% age 15 or younger, 47% age 16 to 18, 40% age 19 to 22, 7% age 23 to 25, and 3% age 26 or older (see Table A-3). Of the sample, 31% were married, 19% were divorced, 28% were separated, 16% were unwed, and 6% were widowed. (Due to missing data and rounding procedures these percentages do not always equal 100%.)

Instrumentation

A self-report instrument, the Home Environment Profile (HEP) (Dickinson, 1995) was chosen for this study. This instrument has previously been used to look at the validity of the HEP in relationship to academic achievement. Crowe (1998) found that the instrument had an internal consistency of .7 or higher and test-retest reliability for the items ranged from .03 to .97.

By using a self-report scale a wider range of behaviors could be considered than by direct observation in a laboratory setting as many other parenting studies have used. Several studies have demonstrated high correlations between parental self reports and observed behaviors (Dekovic, Janssens, & Gerris, 1991; Kochanska, Kuczynski, & Radke-Yarrow, 1989; Portes, Dunham, & Williams, 1986). The HEP measures parenting styles, beliefs, and specific parenting behaviors. All items are rated on a five-point Likert type scale. Most questions (test stimuli) specify conditions, e.g. "when my child does something serious" or "yesterday" and the

answers (item responses) have specific response ranges, e.g. "one time, two times" etc. Instructions for parents asked the parent not to answer items that did not apply, e.g. "when my child does not do well in

school . . ." if their child was not of school age.

For the purpose of this study, a subset of twenty items and three demographic questions was used (see Appendix B). The subset of items was selected by the Project Director, Program Coordinator, and Home Visitation Staff working in the Child Abuse Prevention program who have over fifty years combined experience working with families. Items were chosen based on positive parenting behaviors thought to be essential for good home environments for children. Responses were analyzed to identify specific attitudes and behaviors exhibited by these parents in the home environment. There was no more potential risk for participants associated with filling out the HEP than that associated with everyday life. Workers provided assistance to individuals within the second sample group of participants by reading the items on the HEP because the target population included participants who had little or no reading ability. Reliability coefficients for the subset of items produced a Cronbach's Alpha of .83 for the Non-Agency group, .90 for the Agency group, and .85 for both groups overall. Face validity of the subset of HEP items chosen was established by agency staff working in the Child Abuse Prevention program. All identifying information was removed from the HEP responses to provide complete confidentiality for all participants. Only the individuals providing assistance knew

the identities of the participants. Data was shredded as soon as it was entered into the computer. The goal of this study was to compare responses from an at-risk group of parents to the responses from a group of parents who were not determined to be at-risk.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study a subset of test items was chosen that relates to positive parenting behaviors (see Appendix B). This study was based on the research evidence that parental behaviors and beliefs demonstrated in the home environment impact child outcomes. After the specific test items were chosen a factor analysis was run on these items to see how they related to one another. Once the factor analysis was completed, the following research questions were formulated to look for differences in the two groups in regard to the specific parental behaviors:

1. Do the two samples of parents differ with regard to self-reported parental behaviors exhibited in the home?
2. Do self-reported parental behaviors differ based on annual level of income in the home?
3. Do self-reported parental behaviors differ based on the educational level of the parent?
4. Do self-reported parental behaviors differ based on the age of the parent when the child was born?

5. Do these two groups differ on the general level of stress reported?
6. Do self-reported parental behaviors differ according to the level of stress reported by the parent?

Statistical Methods

The computer program SPSS was utilized to analyze all data. Constructs were determined from the groupings of the specific test items that fit together in the factor analysis. A panel of seven judges agreed on the labeling of constructs for the factors. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was utilized to compare responses given by the two groups on specific test items as well as to compare how the demographics related to the factors. When differences were found within the MANOVAs, one way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to locate where the differences occurred. Spearman correlations were performed to analyze general trends in the data. Chi-Square analysis was utilized to determine if the two groups differed on the general level of stress reported and if the level of stress reported made a difference in the specific parenting behaviors chosen for this study.

As an addition to the statistical methods initially outlined, a Spearman correlation was run on the demographic items and a logistic regression analysis was run to see if item responses could successfully predict group membership when controlling for demographics.

Chapter Four

Results

A panel of seven judges identified twenty-eight questions from the HEP that they believed related theoretically to the concept of positive parenting behaviors essential for good home environments for children. A factor analysis utilizing Maximum Likelihood extraction and Varimax rotation was run on these items that resulted in twenty test items forming a rotated factor matrix consisting of three main factors.

The first factor consisted of ten questions forming the construct labeled communication and encouragement by the judges. Hereafter this factor will be referred to as the communication factor. This factor included the following questions with factor loadings indicated in parentheses:

- In the past week, I have talked to my child about his/her interests . . . (.667)
- How many times this past month have you used your child's ideas to help resolve a dispute? (.610)
- In the past week, when helping your child make a decision, how often have you discussed the advantages and disadvantages? (.609)
- In the past week, I have explained to my child how I do such things as planning meals, balancing a checkbook or budget, fixing the car, etc. . . . (.586)

- Yesterday how many times did you compliment, support, encourage, praise, or show affection to your child? (.553)
- Last week, how many times did you make a favorable comment to your family about your job, home, or life? (.509)
- How often have you discussed the day's events with your child at the dinner table this past week? (.479)
- My child knows what his/her punishment will be when he/she does something wrong . . . (.370)
- I get my child materials, tools, equipment, and/or books to support his/her interests . . . (.332)
- When my child does good work at school, I praise him/her . . . (.278)

The second factor consisted of eight questions forming the construct labeled consistency and structure by the panel of judges. Hereafter this factor will be referred to as the consistency factor. The second factor included the following questions with factor loadings indicated in parentheses:

- I have an organization to my household (place for things, what is first priority, etc.) . . . (.651)
- This past week, when I said I was going to punish my child, I followed through and did it . . . (.629)
- My family helps each other to solve problems by talking, making plans, and supporting each other to follow the plans . . . (.574)

- When I have a problem to solve, I first identify the problem, then develop a plan, and follow the plan to see if the problem is solved . . . (.563)
- The adult members of our family agree on discipline . . . (.520)
- In the past month, how many times have you made out a schedule of things you must do during the day and put them in priority? (.481)
- When I am around my child, my moods are the same . . . (.424)
- I follow an established routine (time for bed, time for eating, etc.) . . . (.381)

The third factor consisted of two questions forming the construct labeled rewards and incentives by the judges. Hereafter this factor will be referred to as the rewards factor. The third factor included the following questions with factor loadings indicated in parentheses:

- In the past year, how many times have you made an agreement to give your child a tangible reward, such as money, for good performance in school? (.763)
- In the last year, how often have you offered your child incentives for good work at school on a short-term basis (next test, homework for the week, etc.) . . . (.617)

A MANOVA was utilized to analyze responses on the three factors for the two groups. The MANOVA found at least one significant difference ($p=.01$). An ANOVA was run for communication, consistency, and rewards to determine which of the three factors differed between the two groups. There were no differences

found in communication (p=.774) or rewards (p=.406). Significant differences were found in consistency (p=.004). The Non-Agency group had a mean score of 4.041 and the Agency group had a mean score of 3.579, therefore the Non-Agency group had scores that were significantly higher on the consistency factor than the Agency group (see Table C-1, Appendix C).

A MANOVA was utilized to determine income difference with regard to the three factors. The MANOVA indicated significant differences (p=.001). To determine which of the factors differed with regard to income one way ANOVAs were run for each factor. No significant differences were found in communication (p=.451). There were significant differences in consistency (p=.021) and rewards (p=.002). Because these are ordinal variables, Spearman correlations were performed to see the general relationship between income with consistency and rewards. The Spearman correlation between consistency and income was .273 (p=.001) which indicates a positive relationship; as income increases, consistency increases. The Spearman correlation between rewards and income was -.336 (p<.001) which indicates a negative relationship; as income increases, rewards decrease (see Table C-2).

A MANOVA was utilized to compare parent's educational level with regard to the three factors. Due to small counts in Elementary or less and Junior High School, these two groups were collapsed into one group. The MANOVA indicated significant differences (p<.001). To determine which of the three factors differed

with regard to parent's educational level one way ANOVAs were run for each factor. No significant difference was found for rewards (p=.255). There were significant differences found for communication (p<.001) and consistency (p<.001). Because these are ordinal variables, Spearman correlations were performed to see the general relationship between parent's educational level with communication and consistency. The Spearman correlation between communication and parent's educational level was .237 (p=.003) which indicates a positive relationship; as parent's educational level increases, communication increases. The Spearman correlation between consistency and parent's educational level was .404 (p<.001) which indicates a positive relationship; as parent's educational level increases, consistency increases (see Table C-3).

A MANOVA was utilized to determine differences in the three factors with regard to the age of the parent when the child was born. Due to small counts in the 15 or younger category the 16-18 years old and 15 or younger responses were collapsed into one group. The MANOVA indicated significant differences between groups (p=.023). To determine which of the factors differed with regard to the age of the parent when the child was born one way ANOVAs were run for each of the three factors. No significant differences were found in communication (p=.110) and rewards (p=.265). There were significant differences in consistency (p=.004). Because these are ordinal variables, Spearman correlations were performed to see the general relationship between consistency and age of the parent when the child was

born. The Spearman correlation between consistency and age of the parent when the child was born was .285 ($p<.001$) which indicates a positive relationship; as the age of the parent increases, consistency increases (see Table C-4).

A Chi-Square analysis was performed on the parental level of stress reported to determine any group differences. Due to small counts, stress was collapsed into three groups: high to very high, average, and low to almost none. The Chi-square analysis found significant differences between the two groups (Chi-square=37.133, df=2, $p<.001$). Within the Non-Agency group only 9.2% reported high to very high stress, while 56.3% in the Agency group reported high to very high stress. Within the Non-Agency group, 34.2% reported low to almost none while 9.4% of the Agency group responded low to almost none. It appears that the Non-Agency group tends to report lower levels of stress and the Agency group tends to report higher levels of stress. A MANOVA was utilized to determine stress level differences with regard to the three factors. The MANOVA indicated no significant differences between groups ($p=.131$) (see Tables C-5 and C-6).

An addition was made to the statistical methodology after looking at the initial data. An additional Spearman correlation was performed on the three demographic items to look at the interrelationships and a logistic regression analysis was performed on six variables to see if group membership could be predicted.

A correlation analysis was run on the three demographic items (annual income, educational level of parent, and age of parent at birth of child) to attempt to

determine how interrelated these items were. Because these are ordinal data Spearman correlations were performed. All three of the demographic items were found to correlate significantly ($p<.001$). Annual income correlated moderately with the educational level of parent ($rs=.661$) and the age of parent when the child was born ($rs=.595$). The educational level of the parent was also found to correlate moderately with the age of the parent when the child was born ($rs=.542$).

A logistic regression analysis was performed to see if group membership could be predicted according to the three factors (communication, consistency, and rewards) or the demographic information (annual income, educational level, and age of parent when child was born). The number of participants included in the analysis totaled 138 with 119 participants from the Non-Agency group and 19 participants from the Agency group. Of the six variables in the equation only income ($p=.001$) and age ($p=.03$) were found to be significant predictors. Analysis using both income and age as predictors predicted 98.32% correctly for the Non-Agency group and 63.16% correctly for the Agency group with an overall predictor accuracy of 93.48% for both groups.

Step-wise logistic regression analysis produced the following results. The logistic regression analysis using income as the predictor predicted 96.64% correctly for the Non-Agency group and 63.16% correctly for the Agency group with an overall predictor accuracy of 92.03% for both groups. The logistic regression analysis using age as the predictor predicted 93.28% correctly for the Non-Agency

group and 63.16% correctly for the Agency group with an overall predictor accuracy of 89.13% for both groups. It should be noted that this may not be a good predictive model for the Agency group since only 63.16% were correctly predicted. This could be due to the unequal sample sizes of the two groups.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Conclusions

This study compared two groups of parents. The Agency group of parent participants had been identified to be at-risk for child abuse or neglect by the State of Tennessee Department of Children's Services while the Non-Agency group had not been identified to be at-risk. The two groups of participants differed greatly in regard to demographic information. Most of the respondents in both groups were mothers. However, the Non-Agency group as a whole were better educated, more likely to be married, had higher incomes, and were older when their children were born.

Self-reported parenting behaviors differed in one major area, the factor labeled consistency. The Non-Agency group reported higher levels of consistency within the home environment than the Agency group. That is, they were more likely to endorse behaviors such as keeping an organized household, following through on punishments, and solving problems together. However, the two groups did not endorse differences in communication or the use of rewards. The Agency parents, already identified as at-risk, followed patterns suggested by Solnit (1984). Their children are being raised in environments that are not well managed and may not

receive the consistent direction necessary to develop and/or maintain appropriate adaptive behavior.

When the three factors were compared based on annual income, consistency increased as income increased and rewards decreased as income increased. When the three factors were compared based on parent's educational level, communication and consistency increased as parent's educational level increased. When the three factors were compared based on the parent's age at the birth of the child, consistency increased as the parent's age at the birth of the child increased. In spite of these findings, logistic regression analysis found that using income and age was a better predictor for the Non-Agency than for the Agency group. In other words, annual income, educational level, and parent's age at the child's birth does not tell the whole story for these at-risk parents.

Consistency and structure are important for better developmental outcomes for children (Vygotsky, 1978; Chao, 1996). Parental self-management is necessary to provide consistent rules and consequences in the home environment. It may be easier to provide consistency in the home environment when income levels are higher. Poverty makes it difficult to meet the physical needs of everyone in the home let alone the psychological needs that are ever present. Lower income homes deal with many situations that higher income homes do not have to deal with. For example, families living at the poverty level often live in substandard housing with inadequate space for all family members and may have to move frequently. Many of

these families have no options other than public housing which is often a magnet for crime and violence. Food may run out before the end of the month. Money may not be available to provide required school supplies or adequate clothing for children to wear to school.

As was discussed by Bolger, et al. (1995) economic stress can make home environments difficult. Participants in this study from the Agency group reported high levels of stress while participants from the Non-Agency group reported low levels of stress. The perceived stress level of the Agency group may be linked to a number of factors such as lower annual incomes and poor job prospects due to inadequate education. Results from this study did not show statistically significant differences between the groups when comparing stress levels with reported parenting behaviors. However, it should be noted that the participants in the Agency group had already met criteria for (and had been referred to) a program for child abuse prevention.

An interesting finding was that as income increased rewards and incentives decreased. As Maslow (1968) theorized, human physical needs take priority over psychological needs. Individuals living in lower income level homes may be preoccupied with thoughts of getting their physical needs met. This way of thinking may cause these parents to use physical rewards with their children more frequently than parents at higher income levels.

Parental educational level does not seem to be as directly linked to consistency. However, a higher educational level implies that discipline and self-management are probably attributes that the parent possesses. To reach a higher educational level, get a better job, or achieve a higher income level requires more self-discipline. Parents with a higher educational level have been exposed to more ideas and possibly other lifestyles. They believe a good life is attainable and they want it for their children. Parents with a higher educational level may also be more articulate and aware of the need for communication. They may provide more direct instruction and have a wider range of topics to discuss with their child. Additionally, they may be more inclined to attempt to pass educational experiences on to their children.

As supported by this study consistency is a function of age. As an individual gets older his behaviors usually become more consistent. It is not surprising that parents who are older when their children are born provide more consistency in the home environment. As age increases, typically, maturity level increases. Ninety percent of the parents in the Agency group were age 22 or less when their child was born. They were in or barely out of the adolescent stage that is known for its inconsistencies in mood and behavior.

Findings were consistent with a study done by Melby and Conger (1996) concerning parent's educational level. Parent's educational level has an impact on child wellbeing and is related to parental involvement. Parents who have a higher

educational level may be more aware of the importance of communicating with their child and providing more explanations. Parent's educational level can also be related to the age of the parent when the child was born (Coontz, 1995). A parent may not have had the opportunity to finish school because of a teenaged pregnancy. Teenagers who have children are still in the process of child development themselves. Typically, they are preoccupied with themselves and their own needs. Developmentally it is difficult for a teenager to focus on the needs of an infant or child.

Crnic and Greenberg's (1990) study found that stress levels in the home environment affected parenting. In this study, parents' self-reported behaviors did not appear to deteriorate with a higher level of stress reported, although the general level of stress was perceived to be higher in the homes of the Agency group. Low income and low levels of education undoubtedly contributed to this perception but factors that may have gotten these parents identified as high risk, such as alcohol or drug abuse, depression, etc. may have also come into play. Two characteristics often found in at-risk homes are lack of coping skills and lack of social support, along with the socioeconomic factors. These individuals may not perceive that they have options to change their circumstances or improve their situation in life, further increasing stress.

Limitations

Certain limitations should be taken into account when considering the findings of the present study:

- Since this study used a self-report instrument, the data collected consisted of participants' perceptions of their parenting behaviors rather than actual behaviors observed and/or counted by an independent observer. Social desirability is considered a limitation of any self-report instrument. Some parents may have answered questions to represent themselves in a positive way rather than answering honestly. It was noted that certain types of questions seemed to prompt more varied and therefore possibly more honest responses from both groups. For example, questions about observable or countable behaviors such as "how many times did you compliment your child" were answered giving the number or a range. Variability tended to be high on these questions. Questions such as "when I am around my child, my moods are the same" were answered by the majority of parents in both groups as "ALWAYS." This may be accounted for by the phenomenon that moods are not "countable" like discrete behaviors. This social desirability problem may be why no relationship was found between high stress levels and parenting behaviors since behaviors like mood would be most affected.
- The groups were not random samples. Although this study allowed analysis of self-reported parenting behaviors from a unique group of parents that met criteria

for a child abuse prevention program, the group was not randomly chosen nor were the parent participants.

- The groups were not comparable in number of participants. The Non-Agency group had 137 participants while the Agency group included only 32 participants. Results might have been more meaningful if the Agency group had been larger and if there had been more overlap between the two groups. There were very few parents in the Agency group with high income levels and very few parents in the Non-Agency group with low income levels.

Implications for Further Research

Further research should be conducted to determine if parenting education and parent skills training programs can successfully teach parental behaviors such as consistency and structure. A study to include a pre- and post-test component might indicate how the parent education and support program is "working" and show how parenting behaviors, beliefs, and home environments have changed due to intervention strategies.

Programs that include parental self-management skills might prove helpful. According to the literature (Williams, et al. 1991; Wells & Forehand, 1981) it is difficult for children to be self-managed when parents are not. Many parent training materials include a lot of information about what to do for the child. Shifting the focus to teaching the parent to manage his/her life may enrich the educational

program and provide many indirect benefits to the child. Pre- and post-test evaluation of these programs would help to determine if parental self-management might be an effective intervention strategy.

Implications for Applied Settings

Teaching parenting skills that emphasize consistency and structure in the home environment seems to be indicated by this study. Many parenting curricula include the importance of rules and consistency with young children. However, few of them stress the importance of maintaining consistency and structure throughout the child's tenure in the home. Although rules should change as children get older, more mature children still need consistent rules and structure within the home environment.

Of the three pieces of demographic information looked at (annual income, parent's educational level, and parent's age at the birth of the child) the only one that cannot be changed after the fact is the age of the parent at the birth of the child. Pregnancy prevention programs targeted at teenagers attempt to alleviate this problem. Intervention strategies for parents who have already experienced a teenaged pregnancy and the birth of a child should be focused on the other two variables that tend to go hand in hand with the young age of the parent. Parent education programs might endeavor to increase the educational level of the parent by providing GED classes or ways in which these parents can get specific job skills

training. Teen parents that are interested and have the ability should be given the option of attending college. If the educational level can increase then it should follow that the ability to raise the income level would also increase. Educational and career counseling should be a part of the intervention program to enable parents to enumerate their options and choose a plan of action to improve their lives and the lives of their children.

If parents are unable to improve on these variables, due to lack of cognitive ability, home-based support services should be made available to these families on an ongoing basis. This would offer a way to monitor the home and ensure the developmental progress of the child. Home visitors should continue to try and teach parenting skills at the necessary educational level for the best understanding to be achieved by the parent.

In summary, this study found that parents identified for being at-risk for child abuse or neglect were most unlike non-identified parents in the area of consistency. Consistency ties directly to other factors in at-risk homes such as low income levels, lack of education, and adolescent parenting. These factors are inextricably tied together. Programs for these parents must recognize this fact and provide not just parent skills training but also ways to work through the concomitant concerns.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Table A-1. Annual income level of parent by group.

			GROUP		
			Non-Agency	Agency	Total
Income	Below $10,000	Count	4	21	25
		% within GROUP	3.4%	72.4%	16.9%
	$10,000-$25,000	Count	20	4	24
		% within GROUP	16.8%	13.8%	16.2%
	$26,000-$40,000	Count	20	4	24
		% within GROUP	16.8%	13.8%	16.2%
	$41,000-$55,000	Count	18		18
		% within GROUP	15.1%		12.2%
	$56,000 and above	Count	57		57
		% within GROUP	47.9%		38.5%
Total		Count	119	29	148
		% within GROUP	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table A-2. Education level of parent by group.

			GROUP		
			Non-Agency	Agency	Total
Education level of parent	Elementary or less	Count	1	3	4
		% within GROUP	.8%	9.7%	2.6%
	Junior High	Count	4	12	16
		% within GROUP	3.3%	38.7%	10.6%
	High School	Count	51	13	64
		% within GROUP	42.5%	41.9%	42.4%
	College	Count	48	2	50
		% within GROUP	40.0%	6.5%	33.1%
	Graduate School	Count	16	1	17
		% within GROUP	13.3%	3.2%	11.3%
Total		Count	120	31	151
		% within GROUP	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table A-3. Age of parent when child was born by group.

			GROUP		
			Non-Agency	Agency	Total
Age of parent when child was born	15 or younger	Count	1	1	2
		% within GROUP	.8%	3.3%	1.3%
	16-18	Count	9	14	23
		% within GROUP	7.5%	46.7%	15.3%
	19-22	Count	15	12	27
		% within GROUP	12.5%	40.0%	18.0%
	23-25	Count	24	2	26
		% within GROUP	20.0%	6.7%	17.3%
	26 or older	Count	71	1	72
		% within GROUP	59.2%	3.3%	48.0%
Total		Count	120	30	150
		% within GROUP	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

APPENDIX B

Appendix B

Home Environment Profile Questions Used

HEP3. When I am around my child, my moods are the same . . . .

HEP5. In the past month how many times have you made out a schedule of things you must do during the day and put them in priority?

HEP6. I follow an established routine (time for bed, time for eating, etc.) . . . .

HEP10. My family helps each other to solve problems by talking, making plans, and supporting each other to follow the plans . . . .

HEP11. In the past year, how many times have you made an agreement to give your child a tangible reward, such as money, for good performance in school?

HEP13. In the past week, when helping your child make a decision, how often have you discussed the advantages and disadvantages?

HEP23. Yesterday how many times did you compliment, support, encourage, praise, or show affection to your child?

HEP26. In the past week, I have talked to my child about his/her interests . . . .

HEP28. I have an organization to my household (place for things, what is first priority, etc.) . . . .

HEP30. How many times this past month have you used your child's ideas to help resolve a dispute?

HEP33. This past week, when I said I was going to punish my child, I followed through and did it . . . .

HEP39. In the last year, how often have you offered your child incentives for good work at school on a short-term basis (next test, homework for the week) . . . .

HEP40. In the past week, I have explained to my child how I do such things as planning meals, balancing a checkbook or budget, fixing the car, etc. . . . .

HEP42. Last week, how many times did you make a favorable comment to your family about your job, home, or life?

HEP43. The adult members of our family agree on discipline . . . .

HEP46. How often have you discussed the days events with your child at the dinner table this past week?

HEP54. I get my child materials, tools, equipment, and/or books to support his/her interests . . . .

HEP59. My child knows what his/her punishment will be when he/she does something wrong . . . .

HEP65. When I have a problem to solve, I first identify the problem, then develop a plan, and follow the plan to see if the problem is solved . . .

HEP67. When my child does good work at school, I praise him/her . . . .

HEP71. My general level of stress is . . . .

HEP72. The highest educational level that I have completed is . . . .

HEP73. Our yearly total income is closest to . . . .

HEP75. My age when my child was born was . . . .

Note: Numbers refer to the original number assigned on the HEP.

APPENDIX C

Table C-1. Means and standard deviations for factors by groups.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication	Non-Agency	120	3.6102	.6409
	Agency	32	3.4902	.8951
Consistency**	Non-Agency	120	4.0410	.7044
	Agency	32	3.5792	.7740
Rewards	Non-Agency	120	2.5292	1.3663
	Agency	23	2.7826	1.1661

**. p<.01

Table C-2. Means and standard deviations comparing communication, consistency, and rewards with income levels.

	Income	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication	Below $10,000	25	3.3566	.9451
	$10,000-$25,000	24	3.5576	.5631
	$26,000-$40,000	24	3.4500	.6248
	$41,000-$55,000	18	3.6778	.5673
	$56,000 and above	57	3.6791	.6882
Consistency*	Below $10,000	25	3.5464	.8775
	$10,000-$25,000	24	3.8716	.6870
	$26,000-$40,000	24	3.8348	.8994
	$41,000-$55,000	18	4.0565	.5201
	$56,000 and above	57	4.1591	.6352
Rewards**	Below $10,000	16	3.1875	1.2764
	$10,000-$25,000	24	3.0417	1.3181
	$26,000-$40,000	24	3.0208	1.3632
	$41,000-$55,000	18	2.1944	1.1899
	$56,000 and above	57	2.1491	1.2534

*. p<.05

**. p<.01

Table C-3. Means and standard deviations comparing communication, consistency, and rewards with educational level of parent.

	Education level of parent	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication**	Junior High or less	20	3.1885	.8837
	High School	64	3.5524	.6844
	College	50	3.6353	.5552
	Graduate School	17	3.9952	.7142
Consistency**	Junior High or less	20	3.1661	.9448
	High School	64	3.8796	.6846
	College	50	4.1796	.5391
	Graduate School	17	4.3666	.4765
Rewards	Junior High or less	14	2.9643	1.1001
	High School	62	2.7177	1.3985
	College	50	2.3800	1.3346
	Graduate School	16	2.2187	1.2512

**. $p<.01$

Table C-4. Means and standard deviations comparing communication, consistency, and rewards with age of parent at birth of child.

	Age of parent when child was born	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication	18 or younger	25	3.3698	.8369
	19-22	27	3.6261	.7739
	23-25	26	3.3920	.7086
	26 or older	72	3.7092	.5895
Consistency**	18 or younger	25	3.6071	.7048
	19-22	27	3.8565	.7502
	23-25	26	3.8055	.9053
	26 or older	72	4.1678	.5934
Rewards	18 or younger	18	2.8333	1.3284
	19-22	27	2.9444	1.3611
	23-25	25	2.4200	1.2639
	26 or older	72	2.4236	1.3496

**. $p<.01$

Table C-5. Comparison of stress levels.

			Group		
			Non-Agency	Agency	Total
Parent's Level of Stress	High to Very High	Count	11	18	29
		% within Group	9.2%	56.3%	19.1%
	Average	Count	68	11	79
		% within Group	56.7%	34.4%	52.0%
	Low to Almost None	Count	41	3	44
		% within Group	34.2%	9.4%	28.9%
Total		Count	120	32	152
		% within Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square=37.133, df=2, p<.001

Table C-6. Means and standard deviations comparing communication, consistency, and rewards with parent's level of stress.

	Parent's Level of Stress	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication	High to Very High	29	3.7832	.8343
	Average	79	3.5704	.6798
	Low to Almost None	44	3.4804	.6269
Consistency	High to Very High	29	3.9015	.7847
	Average	79	3.9986	.7128
	Low to Almost None	44	3.8732	.7721
Rewards	High to Very High	26	2.7885	1.3204
	Average	75	2.6333	1.3440
	Low to Almost None	42	2.3214	1.3244

VITA

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