7-8-2015

Adverse home environments and its influence on academic achievement

John Chillem

ADVERSE HOME ENVIRONMENTS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

by
John A. Chillem

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Psychology
College of Science and Mathematics
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in School Psychology
at
Rowan University
May 6, 2015

Thesis Chair: Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D.

Dedications

I dedicate this manuscript to my parents who raised me in a warm and loving home.

All my successes in life are products of the examples they have set.

Mom and Dad – you are, in all ways, an inspiration.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Roberta Dihoff and Brandon Gordon for their guidance and support throughout this research project.

Abstract

John A. Chillem
ADVERSE HOME ENVIRONMENTS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
2014-2015
Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D.
Master of Arts in School Psychology

Higher incidences of academic deficiency resulting from previous adverse circumstances in the home environment were investigated. A review of Bronfrenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory illustrated the impact of the home environment on a child's development which can greatly influence academic achievement in later years. A vast collection of literature was compiled and presented to shed insight on implications surrounding adverse home environments. The current study examined associations between college students' retrospective ratings using the validated Risky Family Questionnaire and their concurrent academic achievement. The specific measures of distress in home environments under consideration included family conflict, parental divorce, inadequate parenting styles, and low social economic status (SES). The process of how these adverse factors relate to academic achievement is discussed. Lastly, a brief proposal was put forth to call educational professional towards intervention strategies.

Table of Contents

Abstract v

List of Figures viii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Need for Study 1

Hypotheses 1

Significance of the Study 2

Definitions 2

Limitations 3

Assumptions 3

Chapter 2: Literature Review 4

Significance of the Home Environment 4

Bronfrenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory 4

Family Atmosphere and Conflict 7

Effects of Parental Divorce on Children 8

Parenting Styles and Child Behaviors 12

The Effect of Socioeconomic Status on Student Achievement 14

Effects of Overall Family Influence and "Risky Family" Background 15

Chapter 3: Methodology 18

Participants 18

Materials and Design 18

Procedure 19

Chapter 4: Results 20

Table of Contents (continued)

Chapter 5: Discussion 23

Conclusions Regarding Home Environment Conditions Relating to Students' Enrollment in Post-Secondary School and GPA 23

Limitations 25

Future Research 26

References 27

Appendix: Risky Families Questionnaire Responses 32

List of Figures

Figure Page

Figure 1. Cumulative mean GPA of students in groups relating to relationship of biological parents 20

Figure 2. Cumulative mean GPA of students in groups relating to SES 21

Figure 3. Subjects' likert scale total relative to GPA 22

Chapter 1

Introduction

Need For Study

Higher incidences of academic deficiency resulting from previous adverse circumstances in the home environment were investigated. Several factors play a role in developing an individual's self-concept. Overwhelming research suggests the basis for academic achievement is established in the home environment. Distress among young adult students can be derived from parental divorce, insufficient parental involvement or guidance, family conflict, adjustment problems, and the culture in which they live. The purpose of the current study was to identify common problematic issues that negatively affect students' academic achievement in later years. The study explored how past adverse circumstances in the home environment related to college enrollment and GPA.

Hypotheses

This study tested direct associations between college students' retrospective ratings of risky family environments in childhood and concurrent academic achievement. A prediction of the study was that the majority of students currently enrolled in college have experienced support and guidance in positive home environments during their childhood and adolescent years (age 5-15). The second hypothesis was that aspects of adverse home environments would be significant to GPA. Participants' responses to survey items were compiled in a likert scale totaling an overall score for each participant as well. The study's specific measures of distress in home environments that commonly accompany young adults included family conflict, parental divorce, inadequate parenting

styles, and low social economic status (SES). These factors were evaluated and compared to individuals' academic achievements. For the purpose of this study, academic achievement was determined by current enrollment and GPA in a post-secondary institution.

Significance of the Study

There is an abundance of research regarding the well-being of students and their academic progress. Although, many findings have been established, it is imperative to continue research in this field. The lack of sufficient intervention methods for struggling students is theorized to be due to an inaccurate reading of contributing factors. Thus, determining specific factors that contribute to poor academic achievement can lead school specialists to appropriately devise intervention strategies.

Definitions

Social Economic Status (SES) - is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation.

Post-Secondary School – (can also be referred to as higher education) an educational level that follows a completion of secondary school, such as high school. This level of education normally includes undergraduate and postgraduate education, as well as vocational education and training.

Risky Families – described as families that exhibit much conflict/aggression, lack of warmth, lack of affection, or neglect in place of a warm and nurturing environment.

Limitations

A limitation of the current study was the lack of surveying individuals who did not pursue post-secondary education. In this way, it would have been beneficial to compare home environment conditions.

Assumptions

The study assumed all responses to students' surveys were completed accurately and honestly.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Significance of the Home Environment

Human development occurs over a course of transformation throughout an entire life span (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). An imperative stage throughout the lifespan of development is unquestionably childhood. At this stage, the plasticity associated with the engagement of a child is insuperable (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). A vast collection of research concurs that a sound home environment is critical for an individual's well-being and development. It has been suggested the home environment not only designates a dwelling, but also represents a multitude of meanings within the context of personal identity (Williams, 2004). In essence, home life serves as the foundation for children's growth throughout the most important stages of their lives. As the next several sections explain in detail, it is crucial that children are adequately nurtured and exposed to constructive influences in order to foster educational growth.

Bronfrenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

A review of Bronfrenbrenner's work further illustrates the importance of the home environment on a child's development. Urie Bronfrenbrenner was a psychologist renowned for developing the Ecological Systems Theory. His theory predicts that additional layers of influence help shape the family environment and, consequently children's development (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009). The theory has influenced the thinking of psychologists and their approach to the study of human development since it

was first introduced in the 1970s (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994). Bronfrenbrenner's theory identifies five environmental systems with which an individual interacts.

The first layer, the microsystem, is an individual's immediate environment (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994). A microsystem includes interpersonal relations experienced by an individual as a first-hand experience. It refers to groups that most directly impact the child's development. Affiliations in the microsystem might include family, school, friends, and neighborhood. The second layer is labeled as the mesosystem, wherein relations between microsystems exist (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994). An example of the mesosystem would be the relation of family experiences to school experiences. For example, if parents negatively reject their child at home, that child may have difficulty developing positive relations with teachers at school. The third layer is known as the exosystem which consists of the linkages taking place between two or more settings (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994). At least one of the settings is indirectly related, and one setting is directly related to the immediate environment of the developing child. An example of the exosystem is the relationship between the child and the home, and the parent's workplace. Although the child is not immediately related to their parent's workplace, the workplace could influence the home, and thus, influence the child. The fourth subsystem is the macrosystem (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994). It consists of the culture in which somebody lives. Connections within the macrosystem would be an individual's nation, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES). The macrosystem includes the characteristics of material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, and hazards in which a developing child is engaged. The final system is the chronosystem which extends the

environment into a third dimension (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994). This layer covers change over time in the characteristics of the child and in the environment in which a child lives. Examples of the chronosystem are changes in family structure such as divorce, relocation of residency, and employment opportunities.

Ecological systems are generally considered among the most complex because they are characterized by a large number of diverse components and nonlinear interactions (Wu & David, 2002). Each of the five systems independently influences an individual's psychological development. Yet, they are entwined so that a conflict in one system could negatively affect the others. Current literature suggests there are two propositions specifying the defining properties of the model (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994). The first propositions states that, in order to be effective, the interactions must occur consistently over extended periods of time. Such continuing forms of interaction are referred to as proximal processes. Enduring patterns of proximal process are originated in parent-child and child-child activities, groups, learning new skills, athletic activities, and performing complex tasks. The second proposition is that form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes that occur affect development which varies in both immediate and indirect environments. Hence, the nature of the developmental outcomes depends on such considerations.

Experts in similar fields of study have found such impactful legitimacy within the context of Bronfrenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory; it has been adopted and construed as the basis of other rationales. One theoretical framework, in particular, addresses the life course of human development on diverse groups (Spencer, 2006). It

acknowledges that all individuals are exposed to risks, and that certain outcome variations surface given perception-linked and context-based interactions between culture and ethnicity. The central viewpoint highlights not only the "what" regarding outcomes of development but also the "how." In the example of this derived theory, it also explores the various paths for obtaining both resiliency and unfavorable attributes within structured inequalities. Negative implications, such as unsatisfactory academic performance, can surround individuals challenged by perceived or authentic vulnerabilities due to the culture and ethnicity in which they are immersed. Taking this framework into consideration helps to identify patterns of effective coping which result in overall well-being, and thus, advance academic performance.

In summation, Bronfrenbrenner's theory clearly demonstrates that influences immediately related to a child or adolescent have the greatest impact on their development. Thus, in most cases, the family environment is the foundation in which a child mainly learns. Understanding the ecological theory has shed insight in regards to the degree of how children develop.

Family Atmosphere and Conflict

A contributing factor to family atmosphere is whether it is supportive and loving or conflict ridden (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009). In a study of 226 ethnically diverse families with school-age children (Kaczynski, Lindahl, Malik, & Laurenceau, 2006), martial conflict was consistently associated with ineffective parenting: and children exposed to parental discord and poor parenting tended to show high levels of both internalizing behaviors, such as anxiety, fearfulness, and depression, and externalizing

behaviors, such as aggressiveness, fighting, disobedience, and hostility. Internalizing behaviors are behaviors by which emotional problems are turned inward; externalizing behaviors result in a child to act out emotional difficulties (Papalia et al., 2009). An investigation examining family conflict as a major risk factor for poor academic performance among first year undergraduates was conducted (Bahrassa, Syed, Su & Lee, 2011). The findings indicate that higher family conflict prior to college enrollment was related to lower first-semester GPA. Psychological distress was related to both family conflict and GPA as well. The results support the need to take into account family variables and psychological well-being in the academic performance of undergraduate students. Another major contributing factor to family atmosphere is the ability for parents to fulfill their child's growing needs. Regardless of what factors come into the equation, children require consistency. When consistency is indiscernible it becomes detrimental to the child's development. Over the next few sections, inconsistencies children encounter throughout their development are reviewed.

Effects of Parental Divorce on Children

It seems clear that parents (most directly related to the child) play a vital role in development. The United States has one of the highest divorce rates in the world. This crisis does not seem to be resolving as the annual number of divorces has tripled since 1960 (Harvey & Pauwels, 1999). A vast collection of empirically-based literature began exploring the implications of the quality of parental relationships have as a contributing factor to the social and emotional development on children in 1960s and 70s. The dated evidence alluded that marital discord was associated with the development of aggressive

and antisocial behaviors and other types of emotional disturbances in children (Kluckhohn 1958; Lobitz & Johnson 1975; McCord 1979; McCord, McCord, & Howard 1961; McCord, McCord, & Zola 1959; Patterson 1975; Quinton, Rutter, & Rowlands 1977; Rutter 1979; Vogel & Bell 1968). Although advances in detail information have been narrowed, the findings during this epoch of research remain truthful.

More current research concurs that children tend to do better in families with two married parents than in divorced, single-parent, step-families, or when the child is born outside of marriage (Brown, 2004). A convincing meta-analysis review involved 92 studies that compared the well-being of children living in divorced families with children living in intact families (Amato & Keith, 1991). The team of psychologists found children of divorced parents scored lower than children in intact families across a variety of outcomes. A similar study examining the influence of family structure on adolescent well-being found comparable results (Demo & Acock, 1996). Using a sample size of 850, the pair of psychologists collected data from adolescents living in four different family structures: (a) intact first-married family units, (b) divorced, single-parent families, (c) stepfamilies, and (d) continuously single mothers and their children. The results indicate that divorced families and stepfamilies report the highest levels of disagreement within the household, and the lowest levels of parental supervision and adolescent interaction. Adolescents experience more life changes in divorced families and stepfamilies, compared to intact married family units and living continuously with single mothers, which may point to the discernible evidence.

Divorce can be extremely stressful for children because of the marital conflict and then parental separation. Furthermore, a parent's remarriage can increase the stress on children by renewing feelings of loss (Amato, 2003). Divorce should not automatically be considered the direct event that entirely leads to a child's developmental issues. Amato (2005) suggests children's emotional and behavioral problems also may reflect the level of parental conflict before the divorce. This finding proposes that the relationship of the parents largely influences the child regardless if a divorce has occurred yet. All these factors play a vital role as individuals transition into post-secondary education.

Slightly deviating from the findings accredited above, Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000), state that most children from divorced families function normally, but young adults can still be disturbed many years after their parents' divorce. To better understand the effect of children with divorced parents and then leaving home for post-secondary education later in life, Mitchell and colleagues (1989) conducted a study involving 14,004 subjects. The researchers tested whether youths living in stepfamilies, single-parent families, and those living with two biological parents exhibited different patterns of leaving the parental home. Their results suggest that exposure to stepfamilies and single-parent families promote earlier incidences of leaving home, but not necessarily to attend higher education institutions. This occurrence can have negative implications if the youth is not prepared to leave home, although they desire to. The negative effects of parental divorce continuing later in life are well documented. Compelling research, using 17-year longitudinal data from two generations, showed that divorce and marital discord predict lower levels of psychological well-being in adulthood (Amato & Sobolewski,

2001). Data from the National Survey of Children Health were examined to investigate whether effects of parental divorce are evident in young adulthood. Among 18-22 year olds from divorced families, 65% had poor relationships with their fathers and 30% with their mothers, 25% had dropped out of high school, and 40% had received psychological help (Zill, Morrison, Coiro, 1993). Another study reported that adults who experienced parental divorce as children have lower socioeconomic success as adults (Amato & Keith, 1991). The relationship between parental divorce and a child's low socioeconomic status later in life is likely due to their deficient academic achievement.

Among the generalized empirical evidence claiming the negative effects of parental divorce on youth, some research investigates the differences between genders as well. Men and women react to parental divorce quite differently, and overall, women tend to be affected by the divorces more than men (Evan, 1997). In one particular study, a sample of 328 intact and 206 divorced families were studied (Simons et. al, 1999). The team of researchers indicated that if divorce causes the mother to become depressed, the daughter is at an increased risk for depression because of the mother's reduced quality of parenting. However, either parent's well-being after divorce is not a factor when considering boys who show symptoms of depression. In addition to depression, the research suggests, genders slightly vary with increased difficulty in school, engaging in early sex, committing delinquent acts, and using illicit substances.

The negative impact parental divorce can have on a child is clearly evident. Although a divorce does not directly affect a student's academic achievement, it has the potential to damage the individual's development at a critical age. Young adults who

experienced parental divorce may perceive their family as emotionally distant. Furthermore, the results of a lack of family closeness after divorce affect the children's long-term psychological adjustment (Holdnack, 1993).

Parenting Styles and Child Behaviors

Pioneer researchers, such as Diana Baumrind, examined the associations between each parenting style and a particular set of child behaviors since the late 20th century. In one particular study, Baumrind studied 103 preschool children from 95 families. She measured how the children were functioning, identified three parenting styles, and described typical behavior patterns of children raised according to each (Baumrind, 1971).

The first style Baumrind identifies is authoritarian parenting. Authoritarian parenting emphasizes control and absolute obedience. Authoritarian parents enforce effort to make children conform to a set standard of conduct. When children do not comply accordingly to their parents' demands they are forcefully punished. A major negative aspect to this style is the parents' detachment and lack of warmth they neglect to provide. As a result, the children tend to be more disconnected, withdrawn, and distrustful

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Baumrind identifies permissive parenting. This style of parenting emphasizes self-expression and self-regulation. Permissive parents make few demands and frequently allow children to monitor their own activities. Parents categorized in this style simply consult with children regarding issues; punishments are rarely implemented. Although the parents are warm, they are consistently not controlling

and undemanding. The major drawback to permissive parenting is the tendency for children to be immature, the least self-controlled, and the least exploratory.

Authoritative parenting, according to Baumrind, emphasizes a child's individuality but also stresses social constraints. This is suggested to be the most effective style of parenting. Authoritative parents have confidence in their ability to guide children, but they also respect children's unique personality. They are loving and accepting, while maintaining demands for good behavior. They impose limits and adequately punish when necessary. Children raised by authoritative parents tend to be the most self-assertive, self-reliant, self-controlled, and exploratory.

Later research added a fourth parenting style, neglectful, to describe parents who focus on their needs rather than the child's (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parents may turn to neglectful parenting style because of stress or depression. Neglectful parenting has been linked to a range of behavioral disorders in childhood and adolescents.

There is an abundance of research comparing parenting styles to students' academic achievement. A study sampling 354 adolescents matched each individual with their parents' style: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting styles (Aunola, Stattin & Nurmi, 2000). The results found that adolescents from authoritative families practiced the most adaptive achievement strategies characterized by low levels of failure expectations, task-irrelevant behavior and passivity, and the use of self-enhancing attributions. Whereas, adolescents from neglectful families applied maladaptive strategies characterized by high levels of task-irrelevant behavior, passivity and a lack of self-enhancing attributions. Moreover, an extensive article review also

illustrates the relationship among parenting styles and adolescent school achievement (Spera, 2005). The review of empirical research indicates that parental involvement and monitoring are strong predictors of adolescent achievement. The findings of these works, and many more, provide a basis for understanding some of the processes by which parenting styles may influence adolescents' academic achievement and performance.

The Effect of Socioeconomic Status on Student Achievement

Parent's socioeconomic status (SES) is yet another potential contributing factor to a student's educational progress. A review of research suggests that family poverty has selective effects on child development (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Pamela Davis-Kean (2005) examined the process of how parents' income indirectly relates to children's academic achievement. Through an 868 subject sample, the author found that SES factors correlated with the degree of children's educational accomplishments. Parent's years of schooling was found be an important socioeconomic factor as well. The results concluded that parents with higher income and more years of schooling have higher expectations for their child in school. Another study that investigated the importance of the home environment found similar results to the former described above. Language abilities and development of children from three types of home backgrounds were examined (Hart & Risley, 1995). The researchers classified children of professional families (where parents were college professors), working class families, and families who were on welfare support. By age three, the observed cumulative vocabulary for children in the professional families was about 1,100, for the working class families it was approximately 750, and for the welfare families it was just above 500. These

developments happened alongside major differences in the language experiences of the children. In professional families, children heard an average of 2,153 words per hour; in working class families 1,251 words per hour; and in welfare families only 616 words per hour. As a result of these figures, the children from professional families attained the highest IQs, and conversely, children from families on welfare support had the lowest IQs. A meta-analysis of numerous studies further reviewed literature on SES and academic achievement in order to exemplify a collective judgment in the matter (Sirin, 2005). In the sample including 101,157 students, the results showed a medium to strong SES relation to students' achievement.

Effects of Overall Family Influence and "Risky Family" Background

The vast collection of literature regarding family influences on academic achievement points mainly to four precarious circumstances that arise in the home environment: family conflict, parental divorce, inadequate parenting styles, and low SES. All of these factors have be broken down and analyzed to depict a clear picture in the review.

The work of Caldas and Bankston (1997) suggest an overall measure of family status has a significant and substantive independent effect on individual academic achievement. The idea that parental involvement largely influences students' academic achievement is so intuitively appealing that professionals have considered parental involvement an important ingredient for the remedy for many problems in education (Fan & Chen, 2001). Furthermore, a meta-analysis, including 21 studies, determined the impact of parental involvement on the academic achievement of different minority

groups (Jeynes, 2003). The results indicated parental involvement affected every academic variable measured by at least two tenths of a standard deviation for all groups regardless of ethnicity.

The Risky Families Questionnaire has been widely used in a number of studies. "Risky families" can be described as families that exhibit much conflict/aggression, lack of warmth, lack of affection, or neglect in place of a warm and nurturing environment (Taylor et al., 2004). When maltreatment, lack of warmth and nurturing, or high levels of arguing occur within the home, there is a great risk of these variables having a lasting impact on the individuals later in life (Taylor et al., 2004). Several childhood emotional and behavioral issues that are associated with the presence of this type of negative environment include anxiety, conduct disorder, antisocial behavior, and suicide (Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002). Higher levels of depressive symptoms (Sen, Kranzler, Krystal, Speller, Chan, Gelernter, & Guille, 2010), increased reactivity to stress (Repetti et al., 2002; Miller & Chen, 2010), decreased amounts of sleep at night (Hanson & Chen, 2010), heightened levels of explicit anxiety (Edge, Ramel, Drabant, Kuo, Parker, & Gross, 2009), and lack of emotional regulation (Repetti et al., 2002; Taylor, Eisenberger, Saxbe, Lehman, & Lieberman, 2006) have also been linked to risky family backgrounds in young adult samples as captured by the Risky Families Questionnaire. Through the extensive research linking the negative impact risky families have on individuals in later life, it is axiomatic that those negative aspects can have a significant effect on academic achievement.

It is important to understand that intelligence is not simply inherited. Rather, the environment in which a child interacts is the main foundation for development. Factors that contribute to student achievements such as family conflict, parental divorce, parenting styles, and low SES are among the most prevalent.

Although there is much research correlating family conflict, parental divorce, parenting styles and SES with academic achievement, there is limited exploration comparing them as a whole in one study. The current study seeks to examine the rank among each measure; which factors are the most and least determinant of academic achievement.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Participants

Participants were undergraduates recruited from a post-secondary educational institution in southern New Jersey, who participated for partial fulfillment of a course requirement. The sample consisted of 72 subjects (58.33% Female). Self-reported ethnicity was 68.06% White/Caucasian, 13.89% African American, 6.94% Hispanic American, 5.56% other, 4.17% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.39% American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Materials and Design

The collection of data took place during the spring semester of 2015. Participants were selected through the university's subject pool. Adverse circumstances in the home environment were assessed retrospectively by a self-report measure called Risky Families Questionnaire (Taylor et al., 2004). This 11-item measure was adapted by Taylor et al. (2004) from an earlier scale by Felitti et al. (1998). An additional 5 questions were added to the survey regarding demographics for the purpose of the current study. The measure has been validated through clinical interviews conducted and coded by trained clinicians (Taylor et al., 2004). The Risky Families scale requires respondents to rate 11 aspects of their early family environment on five-point scales ranging from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("very often"). No other research materials were required. The study assumes all responses to students' surveys were completed accurately and honestly. Subject responses pertaining to family conflict, parental divorce, parenting styles, and

socioeconomic status were measures of dependent variables. The independent measures were participants' academic achievements which included enrollment and GPA.

Each factor of adverse circumstances (the independent variables) and GPA were measured through bivariate correlation tests. A total likert score was compiled for each participant based on survey responses as well. Thus, the lower a subject's likert total, the more positive their home environment, and vice versa. Participants' total likert scores were also measured using the bivariate correlation test relating to GPA.

Procedure

Each participant completed the Risky Families Questionnaire through the university's subject pool. Participants' responses to survey items were compiled in a likert scale totaling an overall score for each participant as well. The three positive questions included in the questionnaire were appropriately reverse coded. Responses were accrued and data analysis was applied. Responses were compared to find analytical trends in home environments during child development and its later influence on academic achievement.

Chapter 4

Results

The study sample included a solid distribution of students who came from different parental relationships (44.44% married, 29.17% divorced, 18.06% never married, and 8.33% separated). Although the majority of students enrolled in college had biological parents who are married, no differences were shown that related to GPA.

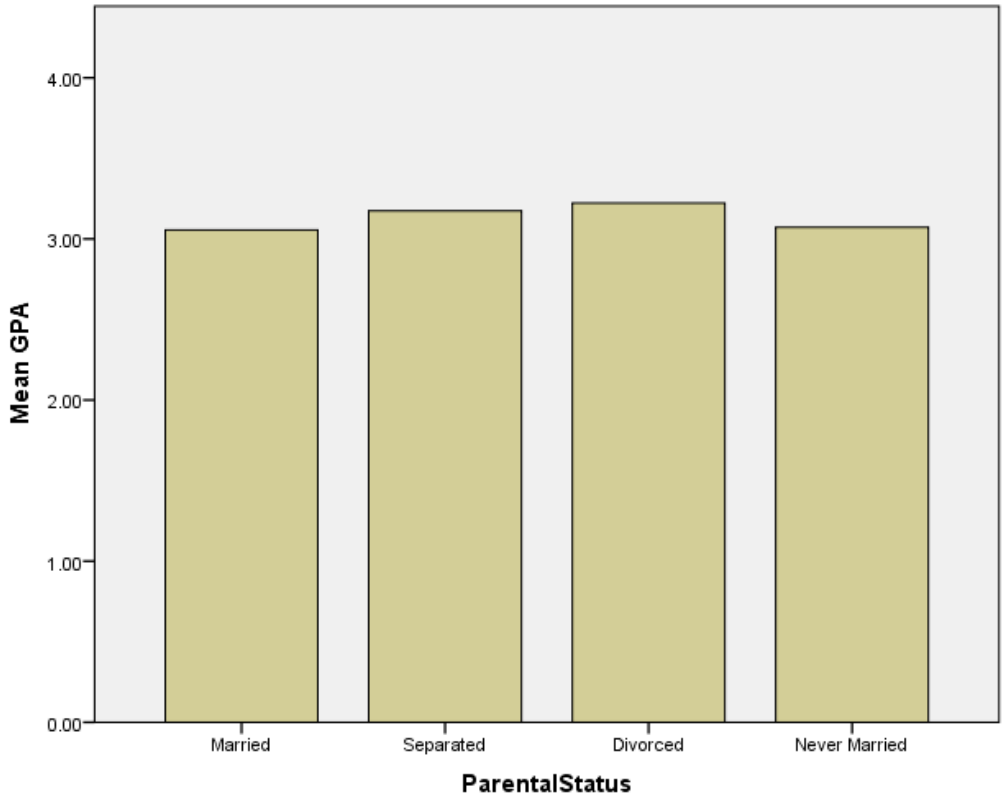

Figure 1. Cumulative mean GPA of students in groups relating to relationship of biological parents.

The majority of respondents enrolled at the southern New Jersey university reported average SES (61.11%), followed next by 20.83% who came from above average SES. Report of significantly below average was the response of one participant, considered an outlier for the purpose of the current study.

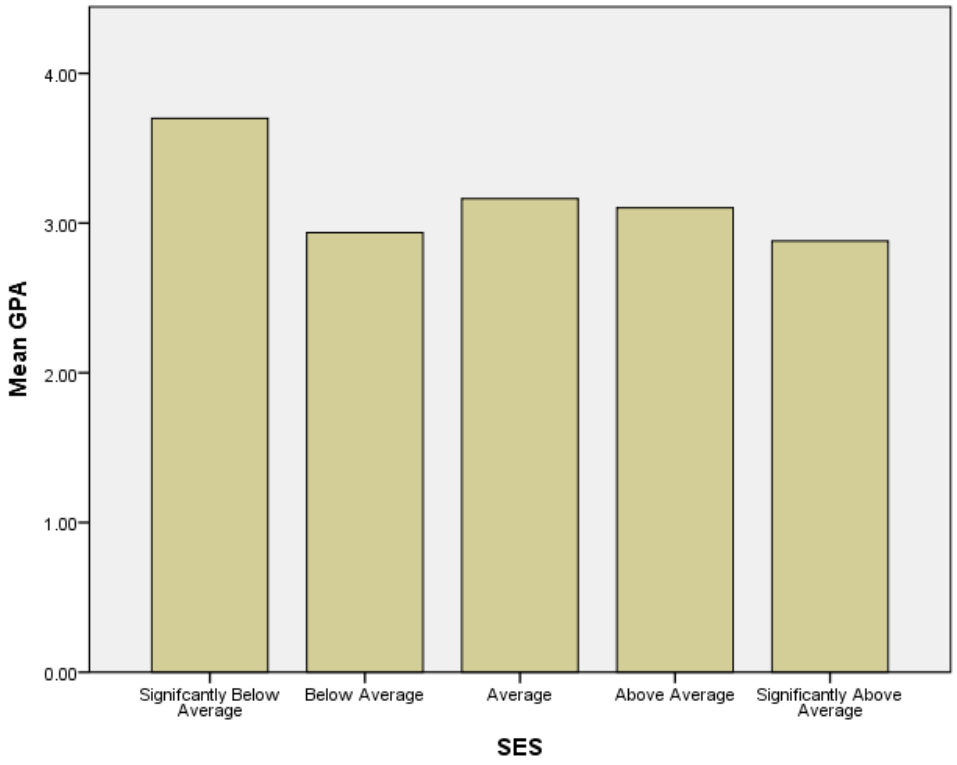

Figure 2. Cumulative mean GPA of students in groups relating to SES.

A hypothesis of the study was that the majority of students currently enrolled in college have experienced support and guidance in positive households during their childhood and adolescent years (ages 5-15). As displayed in *Appendix A*, responses to the Risky Family Questionnaire validated the researcher's first prediction. To illustrate, an

overwhelming majority of participants enrolled in post-secondary school reported infrequent family conflict, sustained married of biological parents who present adequate parenting styles, and average SES.

The second hypothesis was that factors of adverse home environments would be related to GPA. Bivariate correlation tests showed no relations between any adverse factors and GPA. Individual total likert scores did not correlate with GPA either. Thus demonstrating the independent variables under consideration had no influence on academic performance.

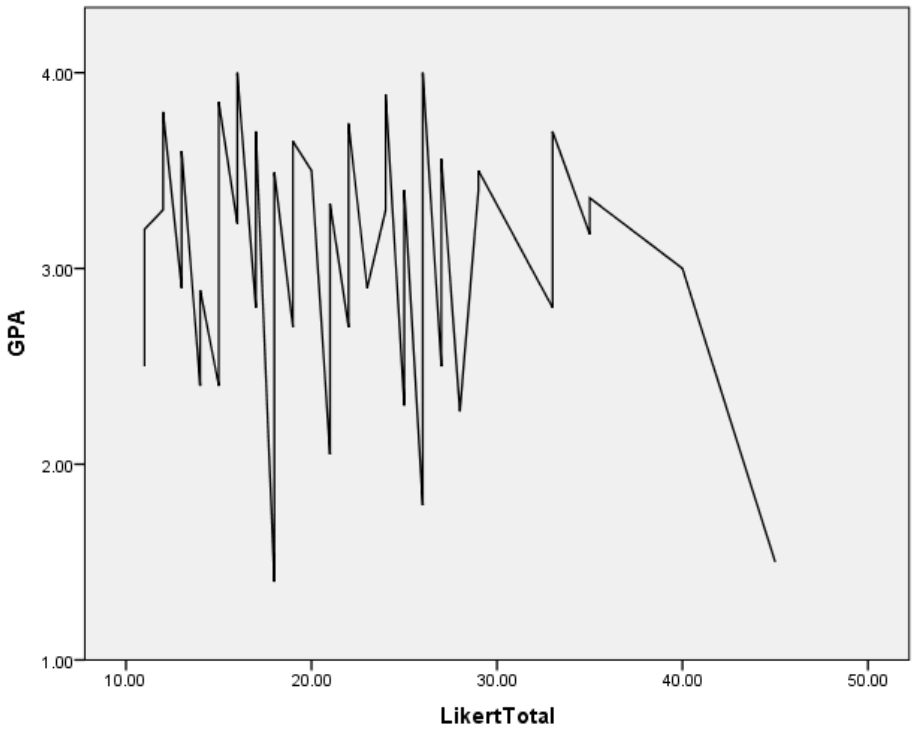

Figure 3. Subjects' likert scale total relative to GPA.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Conclusions Regarding Home Environment Conditions Relating to Students' Enrollment in Post-Secondary School and GPA

It made for an interesting analysis that the results found the first hypothesis to be true, based on percentages, and the second hypothesis invalid. The percentages of students who reported various adverse circumstances were well below national surveys and other statistics previously mentioned in the literature review (Amato & Keith, 1991; Zill, Morrison, Coiro, 1993; Harvey & Pauwels, 1999; Sirin, 2005). These results suggest the counteractive scenarios for individuals not presented with adverse circumstances. As the literature review exemplified, adverse circumstances presented in childhood and adolescences can detrimentally affect a student's well-being and academic performance (Bahrassa, Syed, Su & Lee, 2011; Davis-Kean, 2005; Spera, 2005; Brown, 2004; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Caldas & Bankston, 1997; Demo & Acock, 1996; Hart & Risley, 1995; Holdnack, 1993). The current study's data indicated that the support and guidance existing in positive home environments presented a higher likelihood of individuals pursuing post-secondary school.

Contradictory of information presented in the literature review, however, measures of the study refuted the notion that students coming from those positive home environments performed any better than their counterparts. According to convention, individuals who experienced negative conditions tend to struggle academically. Yet, the results suggest positive or negative home environments had no influence on academic

performance for those who pursued higher education. The leading example of this trend was presented in an SES finding. The sole participant who reported significantly below average SES was shown to have higher GPA than his/her counterparts.

A proposition could be derived from the amassed literature review. Previous research has revealed individuals coming from adverse home environments are disposed to numerous negative implications. This certainly elucidates why the majority of individuals who pursued post-secondary education had experienced more positive childhood and adolescent surroundings. Yet no discrepancy between GPA and students' home environments (positive or negative) existed. This finding may suggest those who pursue post-secondary school are highly motivated individuals, regardless of home environment conditions. Perhaps the same results would not be replicated when investigating students' academic achievement at an age of obligatory schooling.

Another proposition could be home life factors were indirectly related to an individual's academic performance, and thus, potentially insignificant enough to deter personal goals. For instance, although the majority of enrolled students came from married biological parents (44.44%), it is noteworthy to mention students of separated parents correlated highest with GPA. Moreover, while 61.11% of students reported coming from average SES, the single participant from significantly below average SES attained a higher GPA than the average of all other groups combined.

Lastly, students pursuing post-secondary school who came from adverse home environments could be considered outliers as a whole. Extrapolations could be made that the students exposed to adverse home environments overcame more challenges than their

counterparts. While negative factors can restrain individuals' potential, those who persevered evidently encompass strong independence and other necessary skills to succeed in school. The importance of intellectual talent to achievement in academics is well established, but less is known about other individual differences that predict success (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007). Such a trait as grit – perseverance and strength of character – may be a contributing factor.

In conclusion, individuals coming from positive home environments were more likely to pursue post-secondary education compared to those from adverse home environments. However, evidence also suggested the students from adverse home environments that pursued post-secondary education performed equally well to their counterparts.

Limitations

A limitation was the lack of surveying individuals who did not pursue post-secondary education. It would have been beneficial to compare home environment conditions between students enrolled in post-secondary school and those who did not pursue it.

Another limitation was surveying students from only one university. Polling from a variety of post-secondary institutions would allow for a more diverse sample, especially including SES.

Lastly, retrospective questionnaires always possess a limitation in that the respondents accurately consider their past experiences. The current study asked participants to reflect on experiences between the ages of 5 to 15.

Future Research

Future research possibilities include replicating the study with a larger sample size and across multiple universities. Another possibility for future research is to compare home environment conditions between those do and do not pursue post-secondary school.

In regards to elementary and middle school ages, research should continue its exploration on intervention methods in caring for students faced with adverse circumstances. Today, various forms of additional support are offered to students in school. Developing collaborations between schools and factors of students' lives outside of school may be the next step in generating future academic achievement. Alliances connecting school personnel with parents, counselors, doctors, and all others involved in caring for children faced with adversity may led to better overall outcomes.

References

Amato, P. R. (2005). The impact of family formation change on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation. *Future of Children, 15,* 75-96.

Amato, P. R. (2003), Reconciling divergent perspectives: Judith Wallerstein, quantitative family research, and children of divorce, *Family Relations, 52,* 332-339.

Amato, P.R., Keith, B. (1991). Parental divorce and the well-being of children: a meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*. Vol. 1 110(1). 26-46.

Amato, P.R., Sobolewski, J.M. (2001). The effects of divorce and marital discord on adult children's psychological well-being. *American Sociological Review*. Vol. 66 (6).

Aunola, K., Stattin, H., Nurmi, J. (2000). Parenting styles and adolescents' achievement strategies. *Journal of Adolescence*. Vol. 23 (2) 205-222.

Bahrassa, N. F., Syed, M., Su, J., Lee, R. M. (2011). Family conflict and academic performance of first-year Asian American undergraduates. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *17*(4), 415.

Baumrind, D. (1971). Harmonious parents and their preschool children. *Developmental Psychology, 41,* 92-102

Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Sage.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1997). Ecological models of human development. *Readings on the development of children*, *5*.

Bronfrenbrener, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *International Encyclopedia of Education, Vol. 3, 2nd. Ed.*

Brown, S. L. (2004). Family structure and child well-being: The significance of parental cohabitation. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66,* 351-367.

Caldas, S. J., Bankston, C. (1997). Effect of school population socioeconomic status on individual academic achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *90*(5), 269-277.

Davis-Kean, P.E. (2005). The influence of parental education and family income on child achievement: the indirect role of parental expectations and the home environment. *Journal of Family Psychology*. Vol. 19 (2). 294-304.

Demo, D. H., Acock, A. C. (1996). Family structure, family process, and adolescent well-being. *Journal of Research on Adolescence* Vol. *6*, 457-488.

Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *92*(6), 1087.

Duncan, G. J., Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000). Family poverty, welfare reform, and child development. *Child development*, *71*(1), 188-196.

Edge, M. D., Ramel, W., Drabant, E. M., Kuo, J. R., Parker, K. J., & Gross, J. J. (2009). For better or worse? Stress inoculation effects for implicit but not explicit anxiety. *Depression and Anxiety*, 26, 831-837.

Evans, J.J. (1997). Effects of parental divorce among college undergraduates. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*. Vol. 26 (1-2) 69-91.

Fan, X., Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: a meta analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*. Vol. 13 (1). 1-22.

Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D.F., Spitz, A.M., Edwards, V., Koss, M. P., Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American journal of preventive medicine*, *14*(4), 245-258.

Hanson, M. D., & Chen, E. (2010). Daily stress, cortisol, and sleep: The moderating role of childhood psychosocial environments. *Health Psychology*, 29, 394-402.

Hart, B., Risley, T. (1995). Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children. Baltimore, MD: Paul H Brookes Publishing

Harvey, J.H., Pauwels, B.G. (1999). Recent developments in close relationships theory. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 8(3),* 93-95

Holdnack, J.A. (1993). The long-term effects of parental divorce on family relationships and the effect on adult children's self-concept. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*. Vol. 18 (3-4) 137-155

Jeynes, W. H. (2003). A meta-analysis the effects of parental involvement on minority children's academic achievement. *Education and Urban Society*, *35*(2), 202-218.

Kaczynski, K.J., Lindahl, K.M., Malik, N.M., Laurenceau, J. (2006). Martial conflict, maternal and parternal parenting, and child adjustment: A test of mediation and moderation. *Journal of Family Psychology: 20,* 199-208.

Kluckhohn, F. R. (1958). Variations in the basic values of family systems.*Social Casework*.

Laumann-Billings, L., Emery, R.E. (2000). Distress among young adults from divorced families. *Journal of Family Psychology*. Vol. 14(4) 671-687.

Lobitz, W. C., & Johnson, S. M. (1975). Parental manipulation of the behavior of normal and deviant children. *Child Development*, 719-726.

Maccoby, E.E., Martin, J.A. (1983). Socializationin the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. *Handbook of child psychology, Vol. 4. Socialization, personality, and social development* 1-101.

McCord, J. (1979). Some child-rearing antecedents of criminal behavior in adult men. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *37*(9), 1477.

McCord, W., McCord, J., & Howard, A. (1961). Familial correlates of aggression in nondelinquent male children. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *62*(1), 79.

McCord, W., McCord, J., & Zola, I. K. (1959). Origins of crime: a new evaluation of the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study.

Miller, G. E., & Chen, E. (2010). Harsh family climate in early life presages the emergence of a proinflammatory phenotype in adolescence. *Psychological Science*, 21, 848-857.

Mitchell, B.A., Wister, A.V., Burch, T.K. (1989). The family environment and leaving the parental home. *Journal of marriage and family, Vol. 51 (3)* 605-613.

National Survey of Children Health (1993). *Data resource center for child and adolescent health*.

Papalia, D. E., Olds, S. E., Feldman, R. D. (2009). *Human development (*11th ed.). New York. NY: McGraw-Hill.

Quinton, D., Rutter, M., & Rowlands, O. (1977). An evaluation of an interview assessment of marriage. *Psychological Medicine*, *6*(04), 577-586.

Repetti, R. I., Taylor, S. E., & Seeman, T. E. (2002). Risky families: Family social environments and the mental and physical health of offspring. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128, 330-366.

Rutter, M. (1979). Maternal deprivation, 1972-1978: New findings, new concepts, new approaches. *Child development*, 283-305.

Sen, S., Kranzler, H. R., Krystal, J. H., Speller, H., Chan, G., Gelernter, J., & Guille, C. (2010) A prospective cohort study investigating factors associated with depression during medical internship. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 67, 557-565.

Simons, R.L., Kuei-Hsiu, L., Gordon, L.C., Conger, R.D., Lorenz, F.O. (1999). Explaining the higher incidence of adjustment problems among children of divorce compared with those in two-parent families. *Journal of marriage and family*. Vol. 61(4).

Sirin, S.R. (2005). Socioeconomic status and academic achievement: a meta-analytic review of research. *Review of Educational Research*. Vol. 75(3). 417-453.

Spencer, M. B. (2006). Phenomenology and ecological systems theory: Development of diverse groups. *Handbook of child psychology*.

Spera, C. (2005). A review of the relationship among parenting practices, parenting styles, and adolescent school achievement. *Educational Psychology Review*. Vol. 17(2) 125-146.

Taylor, S. E., Eisenberger, N. I., Saxbe, D., Lehman, B. J., & Lieberman, M. D. (2006). Neural responses to emotional stimuli are associated with childhood family stress. *Biological Psychiatry*, 60, 296-301

Taylor, S. E., Learner, J. S., Sage, R. M., Lehman, B. J., & Seeman, T. E. (2004). Early environment, emotions, responses to stress, and health. *Journal of Personality*, 72, 1365-1394.

Vogel, E. F., & Bell, N. W. (1968). The emotionally disturbed child as the family scapegoat. *A modern introduction to the family*, 412-427.

Williams, A. M. (2004). Shaping the practice of home care: critical case studies of the significance of the meaning of home. *International journal of palliative nursing*, *10*(7), 333-342.

Wu, J., David, J. L. (2002). A spatially explicit hierarchical approach to modeling complex ecological systems: theory and applications. *Ecological Modeling*. Vol. 153(1) 7-26.

Zill, N., Morrison, D.R., Coiro, M.J. (1993). Long-term effects of parental divorce on parent- child relationships, adjustment, and achievement in young adulthood. *Journal of Family Psychology*. Vol. 7(1) 91-103.

Appendix

Risky Families Questionnaire Responses

Questions	1 – Not at all	2	3	4	5 – Very Often
How often did a parent a make you feel loved, supported, and cared for?	0%	2.78%	8.33%	19.44%	69.44%
How often did a parent swear at you, insult you, put you down, or make you feel threatened?	38.89%	34.72%	12.5%	8.33%	5.56%
How often did a parent express physical affection for you?	4.17%	2.78%	11.11%	26.39%	55.56%
How often did a parent push, grab, shove, or slap you?	52.78%	37.5%	4.17%	2.78%	2.78%
To what degree did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?	68.06%	13.89%	9.72%	4.17%	4.17%
To what degree would	1.39%	9.72%	13.89%	36.11%	38.89%

you say that the household you grew up in was well-organized and well managed?					
How often did a parent behave violently toward a family member or visitor in your home?	66.67%	20.83%	8.33%	1.39%	2.78%
How often was there quarreling, arguing, or shouting between your parents?	18.06%	27.78%	29.17%	12.5%	12.5%
How often was there quarreling, arguing, or shouting between a parent and one of your siblings	29.17%	27.78%	22.22%	12.5%	8.33%
To what degree what would you say your household was chaotic and disorganized?	55.56%	23.61%	13.89%	2.78%	4.17%
How often were you neglected growing up or	72.22%	15.28%	8.33%	2.78%	1.39%

left on your own to fend for yourself?					