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A STUDY OF THE FACTORS OF HOME LIFE THAT ARE COMMON
AMONG STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION WHICH MAY INFLUENCE
BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL

by
Jenise R. Hillian

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Science in Teaching Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
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Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 10/5/04

September 30, 2004 Jenise R. Hillian

ABSTRACT

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A STUDY OF THE FACTORS OF HOME LIFE THAT ARE COMMON AMONG STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION WHICH MAY INFLUENCE BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL

2003/04

Dr. Hector Rios

Master of Science in Teaching in Special Education

The two purposes of this study were to (a) determine if there are factors of home life that are common among students in special education which may influence behavior problems in school; and (b) evaluate possible solutions to help to decrease the behavior problems. Twelve students in special education at a high school in New Jersey were selected to be the subjects of the study based on their consistent occurrences of disciplinary problems. The parents of the students completed a questionnaire concerning home life and quality time spent on certain activities with the family. The results from the survey revealed that there were some factors of home life which proved to be common among the students. The factors of home life most noted were absent fathers, lack of emotional support, and no quality time spent on homework and family activities. As a result, suggestions are explored as to ways in which schools and communities can help the students prevent or reduce the occurrences of behavior problems. Several programs already in place in some states are mentioned. The common factors and the possible solutions are further discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A. Statement of Research Problem

Behavior problems in schools cause the biggest distractions in the classroom for teachers. Many children who are classified as students in special education exhibit behavioral problems in school, and are therefore subjected to the consequences, which may include detention, suspension, both in-school and out-of-school, and in the worse cases, expulsion. Oftentimes disruptive school behavior can result in poor academic achievement, which can then possibly lead to problems as adults. It is important to acknowledge that there are several underlying reasons that may cause the misbehavior of students with special needs. By understanding the factors that may influence the discipline problems prevalent in special education, educators can offer ways to help reduce the occurrences of ill behavior and subsequently prevent those negative outcomes from occurring.

Many studies have been written pertaining to various factors considered to be the root cause of behavior problems in children. Several researchers have identified sociodemographic, parental, school, and environmental factors as influences of inappropriate behaviors performed by students (Altshuler & Eamon, 2003). The general population of students with discipline problems

might have encountered different issues related to these factors, yet there may be certain factors that are specific to students classified in special education which could influence the incidence of misbehavior.

Interactions at home with parents and other family members are the most important and influential aspects of a child's life. For a majority of special needs students, a home life that is filled with mostly positive experiences will offer the love, nurturing, and support, that can help them to both deal with and possibly overcome the disabilities that they have, and thus, increase the chances for their success in school and society. When the experiences at home are mostly negative, however, these students may react by behaving in a disruptive manner in school, thereby decreasing their chance for that same success. One of the foremost issues pertaining to home life that several students in special education with behavior problems deal with is living without a father in the house. Other important aspects of home life that may influence misbehavior are: (1) little or no assistance with homework given; (2) little or no quality time spent together; (3) lack of parental affection and emotional support; and (4) harsh, inconsistent, or lack of discipline. In the event that any of these factors are present in students' lives, schools in conjunction with communities should take the responsibility to provide programs that can help to meet the unfulfilled needs of the students. Hopefully by doing this, the students will be less compelled to behave unacceptably in school, and feel more empowered to succeed.

B. Statement of Purpose for this Study

The purposes of this study were to determine if there are factors of home life that are common among students in special education that may influence behavior problems in school, and to evaluate possible solutions to help to prevent or decrease the behavior problems. Students with behavior problems often distract the other students in the classroom, and also hinder themselves from excelling in school. There are many reasons why students with special needs misbehave in school, and home life may be a dominating factor. Once the underlying causes of discipline problems have been recognized, schools and communities can unite to assist the students in overcoming the negative influences by offering positive alternatives.

This study will attempt to show the association between factors of home life and behavior problems in school. In doing so, the areas addressed will be: (1) are there factors of home life which are common among students in special education that may influence behavior problems in school; (2) what are those common factors; and (3) what can schools and communities do to help decrease the occurrences of behavior problems.

C. Statement of Assumptions and Limitations

Much of the research findings support this. Another assumption is that many special needs students who display behavior problems in school are

influenced by some of the same factors involving home life. A third assumption is that schools and communities are concerned enough to want to do something to try to rectify this problem.

The initial limitation of this study is the limited amount of time for analysis due to the nature of my program here at Rowan, which allots for less than four months of research for the study. Another limitation is the small number of students involved in this study. A random sample was not possible due to the student teaching restrictions and conditions, as well as the specific requirements of the selection process for the participants in the study. Because of these limitations, the results of this study may not necessarily be generalized to the larger special education population.

D. Set of Operational Definitions

Classified in special education – a term used when it has been determined, through various tests, recommendations, analysis, and observations made by teachers, parents, and possibly doctors that a student is eligible to receive an education based on his/her special needs or disabilities, which could be neurological, physical, cognitive, or behavioral.

Behavior or discipline problem – exists whenever a behavior interferes with the teaching act, interferes with the rights of others to learn, is psychologically or physically unsafe, or destroys property.

Absent father – the man who is the biological parent and who does not live with the child in the same household.

E. Relevance and Importance of the Study

This study is relevant because research continues to show that many of today's criminals either grew up in homes without their fathers, or dealt with other dysfunctions in their home life, and misbehaved in school. Now they are troublesome, seemingly futureless men and women who, in most cases, are hindrances to society. Since the majority of them possessed behavioral problems in school, their futures could possibly have been more promising if there were programs available to promote positive behavior, and also encouraging male role models to mentor and guide them in the right direction. Hopefully this study will help schools realize that it is partially their responsibility today to provide programs for those children who are special education students with absent fathers or other home life issues that may be influencing their behavior problems. In doing this, they can help to create more positive, productive members of society.

F. Data Collection

The data was collected during a student teaching assignment at Clearview Regional High School in Mullica Hill, NJ. A sample of twelve students, in grades nine through eleven, who were classified as special education with varying

degrees of learning disabilities, were selected as the subjects of the study. The selection of the students was determined by their continuous display of behavioral problems, proven by the school's records of disciplinary actions taken. If a student's misbehavior led to six or more detentions or three or more suspensions, then he/she was chosen for the study. A survey (see Appendix 1) was then administered to the parents of the selected students to obtain information regarding their home life.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A. Introduction

Classroom management can be one of the most challenging aspects of teaching for many educators across the globe. When behavior problems are added, that challenge becomes even more difficult to accomplish. According to some teachers, “the education of students with behavior problems appears to be one of the most stressful, complex and difficult challenges facing public education today, and perhaps one of our greatest failures” (Mavropoulou & Padeliaadu, 2002). Although disciplinary issues can be problematic in any classroom setting, “regular education teachers are less willing to tolerate pupils with challenging and provocative behavior than special educators” (Mavropoulou & Padeliaadu, 2002). Because of the lower tolerance for misbehavior that several mainstream teachers may have, some students are classified as special education solely on the basis of their constantly disruptive, often overwhelming behavior problems.

Due to the enormous concern over the effects of school discipline problems on students, teachers, and the learning process as a whole, some researchers have focused their studies on the family environment as a possible cause of this dilemma. In many households today, children are growing up in various family situations. The make-up of the families includes two-parents (both

biological), single parent, parent/step-parent, grandparent(s), other relatives, adoptive parent(s), and foster parent(s), just to name a few. These different settings in the home sometimes may involve situations which are not conducive to positive child rearing, including “intrafamilial interactions that children perceive as unbearable, or at least harsh” (Eisemann, Hagglof, Koposov, & Ruchkin, 2000). More often referred to as a dysfunctional family, this type of environment, where abuse and neglect may frequently occur, has been shown to increase the risk for the development of delinquency in school and later in life (Eisemann et al., 2000).

In addition to dealing with some detrimental issues of family life, another major aspect of home life affecting today’s youth is living in a house without their fathers. This situation can affect children in various ways, including school performance, and emotional and psychosocial adjustment (Allen & Daly, 2002). On average, children who live without their biological fathers are more likely to be “academic underachievers... [and] experience behavior problems at school such as having difficulty paying attention, disobedience, being expelled, suspended, or have poor school attendance”, (Allen & Daly, 2002). Some researchers have noted that these students are more apt to drop out of high school, less likely to graduate and enroll in college, and “more likely to be out of school and work in their mid 20’s” (Allen & Daly, 2002).

Too often these outcomes become magnified when a student has been

classified as having special needs. Several studies have reported the development of disruptive or anxiety disorders in children, as well as conduct problems, and psychological disorders (Allen & Daly, 2002). When these students do not receive the love, nurturing, support, and protection that a strong family can offer, they tend to exhibit higher levels of disruptive behavior in school (Altshuler and Eamon, 2003). To combat this seeming epidemic which appears to be on the rise, schools and communities need to recognize the seriousness of this situation and develop programs that can assist in filling the void that dysfunctional home life and absent fathers have created in the lives of these students.

B. Father Absenteeism as a Factor

Over the years, the number of children with behavior problems in school has increased significantly. There are several aspects of our society which promote negative behaviors in children. *Family First*, an organization which focuses on marriage, parenting, fatherhood, and family life, identifies five factors that can influence behavior. The factors or “warning signs” that they acknowledge are family breakdown, media violence, peer pressure, violent video games, and substance abuse (Five factors, 2003). Of these factors, the destruction of the two-parent family seems to have the most in-depth effect on children. Findings of a recent Gallop Poll show that “79.1 % of Americans felt that the most significant family or social problem facing America is the physical absence of the father from the home” (Absent Fathers, 2003).

Family First states that over 20 million children (more than one-third) do not live with their biological father (Five factors, 2003). The effects that children experience as a result of living without their fathers can be devastating. Many studies have focused on the impact of father absence and found that out of the nearly 40% of children in father-absent households, 85% of them have behavioral and psychological issues (Herinkova, 2000). Several researchers agree that as a result of their absence, aggression and other antisocial behaviors increase, especially among boys, because when present, “men seem to provide a civilizing influence on the aggressive impulses of boys that women cannot” (Broude, 1999). In one study, teachers reported that students living with their mothers exhibit more discipline problems in school than students living with both of their biological parents (Horn, 1998). Also noted was that these students are more likely to be truant, suspended or expelled, and are twice as likely to drop out of school (Horn, 1998).

Unfortunately, many children who exhibit behavior problems in school often continue that same or worse behavior throughout their lives. *Family First* suggests that the early negative experiences of children in father-absent homes create deep-rooted behavior issues which impact them as adults as well (Five factors, 2003). In their study, Biblarz & Gottainer explain that single mothers experience much stress financially, often having lower-paying jobs and sometimes working at more than one place. Using the 1972-1996 General Social

Surveys (GSS), they determined that children of divorced mothers have significantly greater odds of not completing high school, not entering or graduating from college, a lower occupational status, and less happiness as adults (Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000). Additionally, children who “exhibited violent misbehavior in school were 11 times as likely not to live with their fathers” (Horn, 1998). Those violent tendencies in children too often evolve into criminal behavior by the time they reach adulthood. This is evidenced when the first area examined after a child commits a crime is the family structure (Five factors, 2003). In another study, it was found that boys between the ages of 14 and 22 with absent fathers were twice as likely to go to prison (Sharpe, 2003), and of those that do end up there, 85% of them grew up without fathers (Herinkova, 2000). Much research has shown that the average prisoner was raised in a fatherless home (Absent Fathers, 2003).

Many factors play a role in the onset of negative behaviors in children with fathers who are not present at home. In a meta-analysis study, it is acknowledged that the absence of actively involved, caring fathers, and the lack of close feelings towards their fathers causes some children to both internalize and externalize problems (Amato, 1999). It is further reported that these children frequently have higher levels of “psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem [as well as] misbehavior at home or school, aggression, and delinquency” than children from two-parent families (Amato, 1999). Supporting this idea, the results of a nationwide survey conducted during

the 1995-96 school year show that students in single parent homes were rarely suspended or expelled when their absent fathers were actively involved in their schools (Viadero, 1997). Based on the same survey, it was further deduced that this factor is even more impacting for adolescents in grades 6-12, as the likelihood of repeating a grade is also reduced (Brimall, Nord, & West, 1998).

Separation can also serve as a stressor factor in children's lives, for those who experience the departure of their fathers from their homes tend to be at a greater risk for dysfunctional behavior (Harris, 2002). In a study which compares the success of children in single-mother families created by the death of their fathers with those created by divorce, researchers agree, proclaiming that "the experiences surrounding divorce and the father's moving out of the residential household often lead to the development of hostile feelings toward the father on the part of the children" (Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000). Frequently those feelings of displaced anger are revealed in a school environment through violent behavior directed towards other students. In most instances the mother alone has to meet the challenge of both providing the needs of the household and dealing with the behavior issues of the child. This frequently leads to a more severe behavior problem and sometimes a less promising future for the child in special education.

C. Other Influential Factors of Home Life

Statistically, 15-20% of school age children suffer relatively serious

behavioral problems which “significantly compromise their everyday functioning in multiple domains” (Oberklaid, Prior, Sanson, & Smart, 2001). The discipline problems that some students in special education exhibit did not develop overnight. For most adolescents who were diagnosed as having a behavioral dysfunction at the high school level, research has shown that their difficulties had been present for many years (Oberklaid et al., 2001). After reviewing records of their previous school conduct, it was found that during the elementary school years, misbehavior was a relatively persistent occurrence for a substantial proportion of these students (Oberklaid et al., 2001). When a pattern of behavior problems has been established in adolescents, it provides a strong indication that delinquency and antisocial behavior may occur in adulthood (Kliewer & Plybon, 2001).

Various factors of home life have been linked to the development of behavior problems in students in special education. Some researchers have concluded that “the genesis of antisocial behaviors or conduct disorder in children... [involves] coercive interchanges between child and family members, parental discipline and monitoring practices, and family adjustment factors” (Oberklaid et al., 2001). While others have hypothesized that students are more at-risk for misbehaving when they reside in households with “more stress, less cohesion, fewer family routines, and lower levels of parental support” (Kliewer & Plybon, 2001). The premise behind that idea is that families that are cohesive

may be “more attentive to their children’s needs, offer more tangible or emotional support, and may do a better job of conveying to their children that they have coping resources available to them” (Kliewer & Plybon, 2001).

Parents play the most important and influential role in a child’s life. When students experience positive communication with their parents on a consistent basis, and feel a sense of love, happiness, closeness, and attentiveness towards them and from them, the incidents of discipline problems are reduced (Eisemann et al., 2000). Additionally, students whose parents are more involved in their lives, provide constant affection and emotional support, provide consistent, non-intrusive supervision, and “have high overall academic expectations for their children, such as attending college, display lower levels of behavioral problems” (Altshuler and Eamon, 2003). During adolescence, feelings of support, trust, and acceptance from parents are highly needed, and can also deter misbehavior in students in special education (Eisemann et al., 2000).

Just as studies have shown that there is an association between a positive relationship with parents and low behavior problems in school, conversely, there is also an association between a problematic relationship with parents and high occurrences of school delinquency. When students experience parental rejection, poor parental supervision, neglecting attitudes, and overall negative family functioning, greater degrees of aggressive behavior are evident (Eisemann et al., 2000). Additionally, if parental trust, concern, and support is replaced with distrust, suspicion, and blaming, children become more susceptible to behavior

problems in school and later in life (Eisemann et al., 2000).

An even more prevalent factor of home life among students in special education who misbehave is the parents' use of physical punishment as a form of discipline. Parental aggressiveness and conflict combined with harsh discipline in the home are highly linked to more frequent, often violent displays of behavior problems in school, and sometimes lead to juvenile delinquency (Eisemann et al., 2000). Studies have concluded that youths who are spanked are more likely to behave in a disruptive manner in school than those who are not (Altshuler and Eamon, 2003). Further research has shown that in addition to higher levels of antisocial behavior, aggression, and disruptive behavior, the severity of the behavior in school increases with the severity of the punishment in the home (Altshuler and Eamon, 2003).

D. Ways to Prevent or Decrease Misbehavior

With the rise of behavior problems in schools, and the availability of research on this issue, the concern to prevent or at least minimize this dilemma is also growing. Some school social workers have recognized the need to first identify factors associated with disruptive school behavior in their attempt to prevent the development of poor school achievement and subsequent poor adult outcomes (Altshuler and Eamon, 2003). As a response to some of the family situations that may influence school behavior problems, some studies suggest that

social workers devise intervention programs which could teach parents how to “support their children’s academic motivation and interests, how to provide emotional support, how to create an educationally stimulating home environment, and how to increase their involvement in the school system” (Altshuler and Eamon, 2003). They also infer that by teaching parents alternative discipline techniques to replace physical punishment, the levels of school misbehavior may decrease as well.

According to an article in the publication, *The Future of Children*, “feeling loved and cared for by parents increases children’s emotional security, sense of worth, and self-confidence, which facilitate positive development” and behavior (Fathers as resources, 2003). Ideally, children should be raised by their biological parents in the same household. Realistically, this is not always possible. When situations arise where the biological father is not living with the children, then alternative plans must be devised to fill that void in the children’s lives. In an effort to improve the achievement and behavior of those students in special education without fathers in the home, some researchers feel that school social workers should work to increase the visibility of male role models in the school system (Altshuler and Eamon, 2003). They propose that support groups and mentoring programs staffed exclusively by men and minority community leaders could ultimately lead to higher achievement and better behavior control among the students.

Many studies propose that community members should be willing to help students who live at home without their fathers. Some suggest that other adult men in the family, such as grandfathers, uncles, brothers, and cousins can assume the responsibility of a positive role model in the lives of those children. These other men would be expected to “assume financial responsibility, in part or in whole, for the children of other men, model honesty, respectability, dignity, and social wisdom, [and] consistently maintain a positive, interactive presence in the lives of the children” (Harris, 2002).

Some men in the community have already responded to this need. Kevin Johnson of the Phoenix Suns Basketball Team opened Saint Hope Academy in Sacramento, CA, a community center that provides activities and programs for disadvantaged children (Peterson, 1996). Another outreaching program is the Brotherhood Organization for a New Destiny (BOND), founded in California in 1989. Jesse Peterson, founder and president of BOND, states that its goal is to “help men, women, and particularly underprivileged youth, overcome prejudices and stereotypes, regain high self-esteem, pursue their passions in life, and become more caring and sensitive human beings” (Peterson, 1996). Since BOND began, about 60 youth per year have been counseled, and over 90% of them have experienced significant improvement in their lives. According to Peterson, “unless our society reverses the trend of single-parent households, we can expect to see more pain and suffering among youth in the future” (Peterson, 1996).

Several states have already developed programs designed to decrease and possibly prevent behavior problems in children. In North Carolina, the Governor's Crime Commission (NCGCC) made some recommendations for various initiatives to help youth stay out of trouble, focusing especially on neighborhoods with high rates of juvenile crime (NCGCC, 2003). Plans have been made for the expansion of after school programs and also parent training programs specifically created for parents with children in daycare programs. They are also going to increase programs available to at-risk children such as "mentoring programs, graduation incentives, junior police academies, and other programs [that] have been shown to reduce the rate of delinquency" (NCGCC, 2003).

Another state concerned with preventing potential juvenile behavior problems is New Jersey, which places great emphasis upon providing services for high-risk minority male populations. One of its programs, the Minority Male Community Challenge Grant Initiative, has goals intended to "support the family unit; encourage young men to stay in school and reach their full potential; impart to young men the technical skills needed in the future; and reduce the likelihood that young men will become involved in the criminal justice system" (Brown & Jones, 1998). This program also tries to inspire the young male participants to postpone becoming parents until they are emotionally and financially prepared to be responsible fathers. Some of the services provided include "computer training,

mentoring, job-skill and job-readiness training, violent crime prevention activities, tutoring and academic enrichment opportunities, literacy services, social and recreational programs, career training, counseling, and health education” (Brown & Jones, 1998).

Pennsylvania is a third state that “seeks to address the problems arising from the large number of young people who have been raised without positive, adult role models in their lives and who, as a result, are at greater risk of dropping out of school, becoming involved with drugs, or committing acts of violence” (Brown & Jones, 1998). Created by the PA Department of Education, the Education Mentoring Program helps community-based organizations collaborate with schools to link responsible, caring adults as mentors for at-risk youth. Its goal is to “raise students’ academic achievement, and thus reduce their risk of dropping out of school” and misbehaving in school (Brown & Jones, 1998).

E. Discussion

Many articles have been written regarding the effects of father absenteeism and other dysfunctional family situations on the children, and how they may influence behavior problems in school. Most share the viewpoint that those effects are negative and could result in low academic achievement, as well as misbehavior in school in the form of classroom disruption, disobedience, truancy, fighting, or poor school attendance. These behaviors are especially prevalent among students in special education and, if continuous, can lead to

detentions, suspensions, expulsion from school, dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, and possible problems in adulthood. In addition to the absence of a father in the house, the main factors of home life that are considered influential are: little parental affection and emotional support, no quality family time, ineffective or abusive discipline, poor parental supervision, and lack of concern and assistance with students' school work and other interests.

The majority of researchers conclude that positive interactions with parents and other family members involving love, attention, trust, support, consistent family routines, non-intrusive monitoring, and acceptance can decrease the chance for unacceptable behavior in school. Some of the studies also revealed that greater participation by fathers in the lives of their children promotes better behavior. When that is not possible, however, there are some authors who suggest that society is somewhat responsible for filling the void of father absenteeism and should provide alternative positive male role models for the children. Additional research shows how schools and communities together can encourage positive behavior by providing programs that include, mentoring, job preparation, crime prevention, tutoring, counseling, and social and recreational activities. Some states such as North Carolina, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania have developed programs to help at-risk youth succeed academically and socially.

Chapter 3

Methodological Approach

A. Settings and Subjects

The setting of this study on the factors of home life which are common among students in special education that may influence the behavior problems in school involves Clearview High School in Mullica Hill, New Jersey. The subjects of the study were twelve students from the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades who were classified as needing special education. All of the students had learning disabilities, and eight out of the twelve were diagnosed with ADHD. They were all determined to have behavior problems, based on a review of the disciplinary records kept in the main office of the school. They were selected based on the fact that they were issued either six or more detentions, or three or more suspensions for misbehaving in school during the 2003-2004 school year. The small sample size was based primarily on convenience and limitations due to the student-teaching assignment.

B. Data Collection Approach

Prior to beginning this study, permission was requested and obtained from the school principal to use information regarding the students and their families. In preparation for the implementation of this study, information was collected

from the IEP of each selected student including the address, telephone number, and name(s) of the parent(s) or guardian(s). This information was used to send the survey (see Appendix 1) regarding home life to the parents of the students involved in the study. Although the twelve students in special education with behavior problems were selected as the subjects of this study, their parents were the sources from which the actual information about the students' home life was obtained.

C. Data Collection Instrument

A survey (see Appendix 1) was developed with nineteen questions pertaining to the family life in the homes of the selected students. Some of the questions in the survey include references to the following: the adult caretaker(s) and disciplinarian; the amount of time spent with each parent or guardian; and the amount of time spent on certain activities as a family.

D. Data Analysis and Assessment

The data will be analyzed and assessed based on the results of the survey taken by the parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of the twelve special needs students studied.

E. Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The first assumption of this study suggests that some factors of home life

may cause students in special education to have behavior problems in school. This is not surprising, with the divorce rate increasing and the definition of the nucleus family constantly changing. The second assumption considers the notion that many of the same factors of home life could influence special needs students who misbehave in school. Studies have shown that many students struggling with behavior problems are dealing with similar issues occurring in the home. The final assumption optimistically believes that schools and communities will desire to take on the responsibility of helping today's youth live more fulfilling and rewarding lives.

The short amount of time allotted for this study to be implemented (about three months) at the high school chosen for student teaching is the first limitation placed on this study. Another limitation is the sample size amount that represents the students involved in this study. Because of the strict qualifications for participation in this study, along with the restraints of student teaching, the potential for random sampling was not feasible. The results of this study, therefore, may not apply to the general population of special education students.

F. Human Subject Protection

The protection of the human subjects and their families was maintained by the omission of names, addresses, and telephone numbers from publication in this study. The results of the surveys were analyzed anonymously, and presented to reflect the responses as a group.

Chapter 4

Findings

The focus of this study was to determine if there are common aspects of home life that may cause students in special education to behavior unacceptably in school, and to evaluate possible solutions to help to prevent or decrease the occurrence of behavior problems. Specifically, the study addressed the following areas: (1) are there factors of home life which are common among students in special education that may influence behavior problems in school; (2) what are those common factors; and (3) what can schools and communities do to help prevent or decrease the occurrences of behavior problems.

A. Method

To address these questions, the family situation of a sample of 12 high school students was examined by administering a survey to their parents (see Appendix 1). The parents' accounts of the structure of their home life and the amount of time the students spend with the positive male and female adults in their lives was obtained by using a questionnaire consisting of nineteen questions. The participants were asked to respond to a structured series of multiple-choice questions from which they were to select the answers that best describe the home experience.

B. Parent Survey Summary

The parent or guardian was given a survey (see Appendix 1) that contained nineteen (19) questions about the selected student's family and home life. All of the questions were in multiple-choice format, and each required only one answer. The following is a breakdown of the answers to each question on the survey:

1) *Who does the student live with most of the time?* It was revealed that out of the twelve students, two or seventeen percent (17%) live with both parents; two or seventeen percent (17%) live with the mother and step-father; one or eight percent (8%) live with the mother and other adult relative; five or forty-two percent (42%) live with the mother only; one or eight percent (8%) live with the father only; and one or eight percent (8%) live with another female adult relative.

2) *How many siblings or other minor children are home with the student?*

It was noted that three or twenty-five percent (25%) have no siblings at home; six or fifty-percent (50%) live with one or two siblings; and three or twenty-five percent (25%) of the students live with three or more siblings.

3) *Who is responsible for disciplining the student?* The survey showed that seven or fifty-nine percent (59%) of the students are disciplined by the mother; three or twenty-five percent (25%) are disciplined by the father; one or eight percent (8%) are disciplined by the step-father; and one or eight percent (8%) are disciplined by the other female adult relative.

4) *How much time does the student spend with the biological mother?* Four or thirty-three percent (33%) of the students spend between 50% and 75% of the time with the biological mother; six or fifty percent (50%) spend between 25% and 50% of the time with her; one or eight percent (8%) spend less than 25% with her; and one or eight percent (8%) spend no time with the biological mother.

5) *How much time does the student spend with the female guardian?* This question was answered only if the student spent less than 25% or none of the time with the biological mother. Out of the responses, one or eight percent (8%) spends between 50% and 75% of the time with the female guardian; and one or eight percent (8%) spends no time with her.

6) *Who is another positive adult female in the student's life?* This question was answered only if the student spent less than 25% or none of the time with the female guardian. The one response revealed that another positive adult female in the life of one or eight percent (8%) of the students is another female relative.

7) *How much time does the student spend with that positive female adult?* The one response received showed that one or eight percent (8%) of the students spent between 25% and 50% of the time with the positive female adult.

8) *How much time is spent (by the female adult) helping the student with schoolwork?* The answers revealed that five or forty-two percent (42%) of the students receive help less than 25% of the time from the female adult in their lives; and seven or fifty-eight percent (58%) of the students receive no help with their school work from her.

9) *How much time is spent (by the female adult) on family activities with the student?* According to the survey, four or thirty-three percent (33%) of the students spend between 50% and 75% of the time on family activities with the female adult; four or thirty-three percent (33%) of the students spend between 25% and 50% of the time on family activities with her; and four or thirty-three percent (33%) of the students spend less than 25% of the time on family activities with the female adult.

10) *How much time is spent (by the female adult) on social activities with the student?* These results show that two or seventeen percent (17%) of the students spend between 25% and 50% of the time on social activities with the female adult; four or thirty-three percent (33%) of the students spend less than 25% of the time on social activities with her; and six or fifty percent (50%) of the students spend no time on social activities with the female adult.

11) *How much time is spent (by the female adult) on religious activities with the student?* The answers reflect that two or seventeen percent (17%) of the students spend between 25% and 50% of the time on religious activities with the female adult; four or thirty-three percent (33%) of the students spend less than 25% of the time on religious activities with her; and six or fifty percent (50%) of the students spend no time on religious activities with the female adult.

12) *How much time does the student spend with the biological father?* The statistics reveal that one or eight percent (8%) of the students spend between 50%

and 75% of the time with the biological father; two or seventeen percent (17%) of the students spend between 25% and 50% of the time with him; four or thirty-three percent (33%) of the students spend less than 25% of the time with him; and five or forty-two percent (42%) of the students spend no time with the biological father.

13) How much time does the student spend with the male guardian? This question was answered only if the student spent less than 25% or none of the time with the biological father. Out of the responses, one or eight percent (8%) spends between 25% and 50% of the time with the male guardian; and one or eight percent (8%) spends less than 25% of the time with him.

14) Who is another positive adult male in the student's life? This question was answered only if the student spent less than 25% or none of the time with the male guardian. The responses revealed that another positive adult male in the life of one or eight percent (8%) of the students is the step-father; another positive adult male in the life of two or seventeen percent (17%) of the students is another male relative; and for two or seventeen percent (17%) of the students there is no other positive adult male in the student's life.

15) How much time does the student spend with that positive male adult? The survey showed that one or eight percent (8%) of the students spent between 25% and 50% of the time with the positive male adult; and four or thirty-three percent (33%) of the students spend less than 25% of the time with him.

16) How much time is spent (by the male adult) helping the student with school work? The answers revealed that two or seventeen percent (17%) of the students receive help less than 25% of the time from the male adult in their lives; and ten or eighty-four percent (84%) of the students receive no help with their school work from him.

17) How much time is spent (by the male adult) on family activities with the student? According to the survey, one or eight percent (8%) of the students spend between 50% and 75% of the time on family activities with the male adult; two or seventeen percent (17%) of the students spend between 25% and 50% of the time on family activities with him; four or thirty-three percent (33%) of the students spend less than 25% of the time on family activities with him; and five or forty-two percent (42%) of the students spend no time on family activities with him.

18) How much time is spent (by the male adult) on social activities with the student? These results show that three or twenty-five percent (25%) of the students spend less than 25% of the time on social activities with the male adult; and nine or seventy-five percent (75%) of the students spend no time on social activities with him.

19) How much time is spent (by the male adult) on religious activities with the student? The answers reflect that four or thirty-three percent (33%) of the students spend less than 25% of the time on religious activities with the male adult; and eight or sixty-seven percent (67%) of the students spend no time on religious activities with him.

C. Discussion

The survey created was in reference to the family situations and home life of a small group of high school students in special education with behavior problems. The students were selected on the basis that they received either six or more detentions, or three or more suspensions for misbehaving in school during the 2003 – 2004 school year. The survey consisted of nineteen multiple-choice questions. It was completed by the parent or guardian of each student, and took approximately ten minutes to fill out. A survey was mailed to each student's residence with a pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope in which it was to be returned. Fifteen surveys were mailed, and twelve were completed and returned.

The questions asked on the survey included information pertaining to the adult with whom the student lived the majority of the time, the number of siblings at home with the student, the adult responsible for disciplining the student, and the amount of time spent on certain activities involving the dominant male and female figures in the student's life.

The summary of the results of the survey includes several major aspects. First, out of the twelve referenced students, four or one-third of them live in a household with a male present. Out of those four, two or 17% of the total of students live with their biological father. This result correlates to the literature findings which showed that the majority of students who exhibit discipline problems in school live in a home without a father.

Secondly, the survey also revealed that parents are not spending much time helping their children with homework. According to the survey, only $\frac{1}{4}$ or 25% of time spent with their children is used to assist with schoolwork, and out of the twelve special education students studied, only seven or 58% of them actually get any help with homework. This revelation signifies the importance of the after-school programs in the communities that include mentoring and assistance with schoolwork. As the research acknowledged, children need parents to show their concern with all aspects of their lives, and education is no exception. By assisting and encouraging them to perform well in school, parents show their children that (1) their success in school is important to them, and (2) education in general is an invaluable key to their success in life and their future.

A third aspect revealed by the survey is that children spend more time in general with their mothers than with their fathers. Ten out of the twelve students involved, or 83%, spend at least half of their time with their biological mothers, compared to only two or 17% of the students who spend at least half of their time with their biological fathers. This factor also reinforces the research results which mention the fact that the behavior of students is negatively affected by the absence of their fathers in their lives. As evidenced in the findings, the students without active fathers tend to act more aggressively and unacceptably in school than those whose fathers are present and actively involved in their lives.

The last aspect of the survey results to be discussed involves the time spent on family, social, and religious activities by the students and their parents.

The survey revealed that for eight or 66% of the students, at least 50% of the time spent on family activities is with the mothers or female guardians, yet for only three or 25% of the students, at least 50% of the time spent on the same activities is shared with the fathers or male guardians. It was also revealed that half of the students spend at least 25% of their time on social activities with their mothers or female guardians, which may include taking the students to and from the activities, versus $\frac{1}{4}$ of the students who spend less than 25% doing the same activities with their fathers or male guardians. Regarding the time spent on religious activities, half of the students attend the programs with their mothers or female guardians, compared to a third of them attending with their fathers or male guardians. As determined in the above research, involvement by both parents in all aspects of a child's life can make a positive difference on the relationship between them, as well as on the way they feel about themselves.

The literature concluded, the survey also shows that there appears to be a connection to the lack of parental support and involvement, and misbehavior in school. The importance of community programs can again be emphasized, since most of them include the presence of role models who stress the importance of academic achievement and appropriate behavior, both in and out of school. Again, by knowing that their parents care about their interests and concerns, children will show more respect for their teachers, fellow schoolmates, and most importantly, themselves, which will lead to a more positive, productive future outcome.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Significance of the Study

Many students in special education exhibit discipline problems in school which sometimes hinder them from succeeding academically, and often cause them to experience more trouble in adulthood. This study attempted to (1) determine if there are factors of home life that are common among students in special education which may influence behavior problems in school; and (2) evaluate possible solutions that may help to prevent or decrease the behavior problems.

This study has determined that there are definitely common factors of home life among special education students which are influential in their misbehavior in school. As evidenced by the literature review and by the survey given, those factors include: (1) single-parent households, more specifically, father-absent homes; (2) little assistance with homework given; and (3) little quality time spent together.

The research clearly states that fathers play an important role in the lives of their children. When the fathers are not a part of their lives, a void is created that cannot be filled by mothers alone. Because of this, one result may be the

development of behavior problems in school. The survey revealed that only two of the twelve special education students with discipline problems live in the same household as their biological fathers. As apparent in the literature findings, this is a nationwide issue that needs immediate attention. It was also noted that misbehavior in school often leads to juvenile delinquency and possibly adult imprisonment, as the research disclosed that about half of the inmates grew up in a home with no father present. According to the survey results, at least ten of the students are at-risk to possibly live delinquent lives.

Another common factor displayed by both the research and survey is the lack of an effective amount of time spent by the parents on helping their children with their homework. Students, especially those diagnosed with special needs, often need assistance with schoolwork. When parents make themselves available to help their children in this area, they are expressing care and concern for their education, and additionally encouraging their children to succeed academically, which may insure a more prosperous future. Although the survey revealed that slightly over half of the students receive help with their homework, that number should be higher due to the fact that the majority of students in special education have been diagnosed with learning disabilities.

In regards to the third common factor, there is a low amount of quality time spent by the parents, especially the fathers, on family, social, and religious activities with their children. This obviously affects the behavior of the special education students who were the subjects of the survey, as most of the time spent

on these activities, which was less than 25% of their time, was with their mothers or female guardians. All students need to be shown love, as well as concern, encouragement, and support for their interests and activities by both parents as much as possible. Those students with special needs particularly require this from their parents due to the unfortunate fact that they are sometimes the subject of ridicule and mistreatment by others because of their disabilities.

Since the common factors shared by students in special education with discipline problems were determined, it was very uplifting to discover that there are programs already in existence throughout the country that were developed for the purpose of filling the void in the lives of these at-risk students created by father absenteeism and non-supportive parents. As uncovered in the literature findings, some of the responsibility for assisting these students is assumed by the schools, while some of it is also claimed by the communities. Most of these programs involve positive role models who provide mentoring, job preparation, crime prevention, tutoring, counseling, and social and recreational activities for the children after school, during the summer months, and sometimes on weekends as well. Even more importantly, these programs instill a feeling of belonging for special needs students who have behavior problems and who may not receive that from home. The encouragement, concern, and guidance given by the adult participants in these programs is often just what the students need to discourage them from misbehaving in school, and at the same time place them on the right track to success.

B. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions

The results of this study proved to be both disappointing and encouraging at the same time. Although the findings of this study concurred with my initial purpose, it was a disappointment to discover that dysfunctional families are so rampant in America, and so influential, as well, in the negative behavior of our students. It was also disheartening to confirm that more than half of the special education students involved in the study did not live with their fathers. On the other hand, it was encouraging to find out that many schools and communities across the nation are proactively trying to counter the damage done by these familial situations by offering positive alternatives for the students to choose to offset their possibly negative environments, and deter them from misbehaving at the same time.

The two main limitations of this study were that of time and a small, inclusive, non-random sample of students used for the survey. Due to the intense type of masters' program that it was at Rowan University, the student teaching assignment lasted for just four months. During that time the study was supposed to be conducted concurrently with the duties of student teaching, in addition to studying for the college classes. The nature of the program also limited the student sample to include only students classified in special education as opposed to the inclusion of the general education population. The size of the sample was also due to the selection process used to determine the eligibility of the

participating students. The criteria used to identify such students reduced the number of participants to fifteen, and then only twelve of their parents actually completed the survey.

A suggestion to try to rectify the situation of behavior problems due to dysfunctional home life is that all schools with a high percentage of discipline problems show more concern for decreasing those numbers by including mentor programs in their weekly schedule. As a comparison with the programs for the gifted students, who are identified by their teachers and parents, and who meet on a weekly basis, there could also be a mentoring program for the under-privileged or at-risk students, who are also identified by their teachers and parents, and who could meet on a weekly basis as well. The mentors could include teachers and administrators (especially males), and could also involve members of the community. They could meet in school weekly, and possibly twice monthly on a weekend to spend time together on a social basis. This would especially benefit those students who live in single-parent households, and also those whose parents do not have the time or financial resources to spend on social activities. As both the schools and communities continue to provide the nurturing and guidance that many students lack at home, not only will the behavior problems decrease, but the productivity and morality of our society will increase.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

Please circle the letter below that best answers each question.

1. Who does the student live with most of the time?

- a) Mother and Father
- b) Mother and Step-father
- c) Mother and other adult relative
- d) Mother only
- e) Father and Step-mother
- f) Father and other adult relative
- g) Father only
- h) Other Female Adult Relative
- i) Other Male Adult Relative
- j) Adult Friend
- k) Foster Family

2. How many siblings or other minor children are home with the student?

- a) None
- b) 1-2
- c) 3-4
- d) More than 4

3. Who is responsible for disciplining the student?

- a) Mother
- b) Father
- c) Step-mother
- d) Step-father
- e) Other Female Adult Relative
- f) Other Male Adult Relative
- g) Adult Friend
- h) Foster Parent
- i) No One

4. How much time does the student spend with the Biological Mother?

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

***** If the above answer is a, b, or c, please go to #8 *****

5. How much time does the student spend with the Female Guardian?

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

***** If the above answer is a, b, or c, please go to #8 *****

6. Who is another *positive* adult female in the student's life?

- a) Step-mother
- b) Other Female Relative
- c) Family Friend / Neighbor
- d) Pastor
- e) Teacher
- f) Foster Mother
- g) No One

7. How much time does the student spend with that *positive* adult female?

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

The following questions refer to the time spent with the positive adult female:

8. How much time is spent helping the student with schoolwork?

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

The following questions refer to the time spent with the positive adult female:

9. How much time is spent on family activities with the student?

(ie. Vacations, family celebrations, dinners, game nights, etc.)

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

10. How much time is spent on social activities with the student?

(ie. Sports teams, girl/boy scouts, chorus, drama club, band, etc)

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

11. How much time is spent on religious activities with the student?

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

The following questions refer to the adult male:

12. How much time does the student spend with the Biological Father?

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

***** *If the above answer is a, b, or c, please go to #16* *****

13. How much time does the student spend with the Male Guardian?

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

***** *If the above answer is a, b, or c, please go to #16* *****

14. Who is another *positive* adult male in the student's life?

- a) Step-father
- b) Other Male Relative
- c) Family Friend / Neighbor
- d) Pastor
- e) Teacher
- f) Foster Father
- g) No One

15. How much time does the student spend with that *positive* adult male?

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

The following questions refer to the time spent with the positive adult male:

16. How much time is spent helping the student with schoolwork?

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

17. How much time is spent on family activities with the student?

(ie. Vacations, family celebrations, dinners, game nights, etc.)

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

18. How much time is spent on social activities with the student?

(ie. Sports teams, girl/boy scouts, chorus, drama club, band, etc)

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

19. How much time is spent on religious activities with the student?

- a) Over 75% of the time
- b) Between 50% and 75% of the time
- c) Between 25% and 50% of the time
- d) Less than 25% of the time
- e) None

