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# Characteristics of Parents Involved in a Parent Child Center-Head Start Program

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Selove,  
Rebecca J.

1979

Characteristics of Parents Involved in a  
Parent Child Center-Head Start Program

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Rebecca J. Selove

December 1979

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November 20, 1979

Dean Elmer Gray  
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Dear Sir:

I am enclosing my master's thesis, which has been approved by my committee of psychology faculty members, for your approval. I am currently enrolled for one matriculation hour at WKU, and would like to graduate in December. I appreciate your assistance and information so that I may accomplish this process.

If there are changes for me to make in the thesis, I would appreciate your letting me know either by mail or by phone. I may be reached at 615-383-3497 (home) or 615-383-5246 during the day.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

*Rebecca Selove*  
Rebecca Selove

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS INVOLVED IN A  
PARENT CHILD CENTER-HEAD START PROGRAM

Recommended November 27, 1979  
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CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS INVOLVED IN A PARENT CHILD CENTER-  
HEAD START PROGRAM

Rebecca J. Selove

December, 1979

38 pages

Directed by: Lois E. Layne, Ph.D., Elsie Dotson, Ph.D.,

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An exploratory study was conducted to provide information for the coordinators of the Parent Child Center and Head Start (PCC-HS) Program in Leitchfield, Kentucky. Staff concern for parent involvement led to a search for parent characteristics which correlate with amount of participation in program activities. Sixty-five families, which included 65 mothers, 47 fathers, and 121 children, constituted the study sample. Data were obtained from records maintained by the PCC-HS staff. Variables included number of hours volunteered, age and level of education of each parent, estimated family income, family size, mother's enrollment in PCC when pregnant, number of children in the family who have been enrolled in PCC and HS, presence of a handicapped child in the family, source of referral, and length of contact with the program. Hypotheses were that greater parent involvement was associated with presence of a handicapped child in the family, enrollment in PCC, parental initiation of contact with the staff, and longer contact with the staff. Parent involvement was defined as the number of volunteer hours recorded by each parent during an eight month period. Relationships between involvement and the remaining variables were assessed with a Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance. Only age of father and presence of a handicapped child in the family were significantly related to the number of hours volunteered.

Characteristics of Parents Involved in a Parent Child Center-  
Head Start Program

Federal funds are available for the operation of Parent Child Centers and Head Start Programs in the United States, contingent upon the provision of coordinated services described by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity, 1965). The staff of both programs consider parents to be a principle influence in the development of children. This consideration underlies the services offered which include health care for children, classes for parents and children, comprehensive social services, and opportunities for parents to be involved in planning and implementing the program. Involvement legitimizes the program by utilizing consumers of preschool education in the process of providing services. Additionally, the philosophy of Project Head Start is that "working together, parents and those who care for their children away from home can reinforce each other's efforts; without cooperation neither can be fully effective" (OEO, 1965, p. 31).

Parent Child Centers and Head Start programs emphasize parent involvement activities as opportunities for the staff to model and to teach parenting skills and to identify family needs. Parents in both programs may choose from a variety of ways to be involved in the programs in which their preschool children are enrolled. In addition to participating in decisions which affect the school, parents may



attend classes related to topics such as consumer education, work with child educators in the classrooms, help in the school kitchen, repair furniture, or contribute time in other ways.

In Leitchfield, Kentucky, a Parent Child Center which enrolls women who are pregnant as well as children up to the age of three and their parents, and a Head Start Program which serves children from three to six years of age are coordinated and offered in the same building. The staff thus has a unique opportunity to provide continuous service for families with children from birth to six years of age. Many parents make less than full use of available services.

The coordinators of these two programs expressed a desire for more contact with the parents they serve. The staff requested information for assessing the impact of the present approach to parent involvement and for adapting their program to their population to enhance the quality and quantity of parent participation. The present study was conducted to explore differences among parents who vary in degree of involvement in the Leitchfield PCC-HS Program. Thirteen variables which were selected from records maintained by the program staff were investigated as correlates of parent involvement, which was defined as the number of volunteer hours recorded over an eight-month period.

There were few studies in the literature which focused on parents' involvement in educational programs for their children. There were no systematic investigations of parent characteristics which correlated with degree of involvement. However, some investigations focused on other facets of parent-child relationships. Three types



of relevant studies were reviewed: investigations of parent variables associated with socioeconomic indices, studies of children whose parents were involved in preschool programs, and evaluation of parent education programs. The role and definition of parent involvement was investigated.

The legislation which provided funds for the Leitchfield PCC-HS Program specified that services were to be delivered primarily to low income families. Reports of low income family characteristics have included several variables which may be related to the degree to which parents participate in their children's educational programs. Among these variables were family income, level of education and age of parent, and family size.

Havighurst and Davis (1955) reviewed data from two investigations and concluded that "middle class parents have higher educational expectations of their children" (p. 441). Income and education of parents have also been related to aspirations and values by Kohn (1959) and McMillan (1967). These variables have been investigated in relationship to parenting behaviors (Bayley & Schaefer, 1960; Gordon, 1969; Hess & Shipman, 1965; Ruley, 1966), to characteristics of the home environment (Pavenstedt, 1965), to numerous characteristics of children such as physical well-being (Bee, 1974) and performance on measures of success in school (Bailey, 1965; Golden, Birns, Bridger & Moss, 1971; Sigel & Perry, 1968; Weber, 1969). Several researchers have suggested that there are different styles of parenting among low low income parents and high low income parents (Pavenstedt, 1965; Ruley, 1966). Also, Ruley (1966) investigated childrearing practices such as

encouraging the child to fight among lower SES families. She reported that age and level of education of parent, and family size were related to the likelihood of several parenting behaviors.

In several of these studies, income may have been confounded with family stability. In an attempt to assess affects of this variable, Pavenstedt (1965) compared two samples, upper-lower and very low lower class families, which she described as "organized, stable, often upwardly mobile" and "deprived, disorganized, multi-problem families" (p. 89).

A tentative hypothesis based on this body of literature was that income, level of education and age of parent, and family size were associated with quantitative differences in parenting behaviors. These studies provided no evidence for predicting characteristics of parents who volunteered to spend time at the Leitchfield PCC-HS; however, these variables have been related to behaviors and attitudes of parents whose income level was similar to the population of the present investigation. For this exploratory study these were assessed as correlates of parent involvement.

The effect of parent participation on child variables has been discussed in evaluations of preschool programs. Involvement of parents has been found to correlate with relatively higher achievement test scores (Hess, 1969; Karnes, Studley, Wright & Hodgins, 1968; Kinard, 1974; Willmon, 1969) and with high scores on indices of psychosocial maturity and with health of children (Garwood & Augenbraum, 1967). Karnes et al (1968) paid selected mothers three dollars per training session and subsequently compared IQ scores and linguistic

scale scores of their children and matched controls. Differences in performance on measures of child development have been associated with parent participation in parent training programs (Levenstein & Sunley, 1968; Stevens, 1974). Although parent involvement was a valued component of each of these programs, none of these investigators described comparison of involved and matched non-involved parents.

Studies by Elliott (1977) and Wohlford (1974) included a focus on parents who attended childrearing classes. Elliott's evaluation incorporated a criterion referenced mastery test to compare changes in parents' concepts of appropriate childrearing activities in groups led by professional and nonprofessional trainers. She reported "some evidence to indicate that subjects who were willing to attend an intensive five and one-half hour workshop may have become more aware of cognitive concepts of appropriate childrearing stimulative activities" (p. 5034). However, neither a description of her recruitment procedure nor characteristics of subjects who attended the course were provided. Some parent data were reported by Wohlford (1974) who investigated levels of participation in parent training groups differing in composition (fathers and mothers) and trainer variables. He stated that "two voluntary groups and six groups in which each parent would be paid five dollars per session were planned. However, the less than optimal participation of the voluntary group in the first series prompted the rejection of a voluntary group in the second series" (p. 231). He did not describe differences among parents other than frequency of attendance at meetings.



The previously cited authors utilized several definitions of parent involvement (see Table 1). The operational definitions included amounts of time, occurrence of specified observable events, and ratings on scales. No two authors used the same definition. The Parent Involvement Activity Record (PIAR) which is available for Head Start Programs, was not used by any investigator for measuring parent involvement. This form provides a record of the amount of time volunteered to the program and of the activity performed by the parent.

In summary, the literature which was reviewed included investigations of parent characteristics associated with socioeconomic variables, studies of children whose parents were involved in their educational program, and evaluations of parent training groups. No studies were found which indicated differences between involved and noninvolved parents. No consistent definition of parent involvement was identified.

These study results suggested that parent involvement in education was a means of enhancing a child's school performance, and that it was sometimes difficult for investigators to obtain participants in parent training groups. There was some description of low income parents; however, in general there was little information regarding characteristics of parents who were involved in their children's pre-school program or in parent training programs.

The problem addressed in this study was to describe parents who volunteered differing amounts of time at the Leitchfield PCC-HS Program in terms of variables available in the program files. This



Table 1

## Definition of Parent Involvement Provided by Author(s) Cited

---

<u>Author(s)</u>	
Elliott (1977)	Parent attendance of a five and one-half hour workshop
Garwood & Augenbraum (1967)	Parent participation as evaluated in a standardized family interview and an individual interview with the mother, which focused on the Head Start child, and which was conducted by the program social worker. The procedure was not described.
Hess (1969)	Parents reading to their child, awareness of how the child was doing in school, interest in the child's activities, and assistance in school and non-school tasks
Kinard (1974)	Responses on a parent involvement questionnaire, administered to parents, Head Start teachers, and parent involvement personnel. The questionnaire was not described.
Levenstein & Sunley (1968)	Participation by mothers in an experimental group in which social workers demonstrated use of play materials to stimulate verbal interaction.
Stevens (1974)	The author's informal evaluation of parents who had participated in group meetings

Table 1 continued

---

Willmon (1969)	Evaluations made by Head Start teachers establishing the parents as to type and amount of participation. Classifications were active involvement, highly active involvement, or non-involvement.
Wohlford (1974)	Attendance and participation in Head Start parent training groups

---

information was provided for the staff to use in assessing and planning their efforts to increase contact with parents whose children were enrolled in the program.

The number of hours volunteered by each parent was selected as an index of parent involvement. This was recorded by HS and PCC parents on a Parent Involvement Activity Record (PIAR) after completion of an activity. The total number of hours recorded by each parent during an eight month period served as a dependent variable in the statistical analyses reported in this investigation. Parents of children in the PCC were required to attend activities with their child, and were encouraged to volunteer additional time at the Center. In contrast, HS encouraged but did not require parent participation as a condition of enrollment. The time recorded on the PIAR by PCC parents did not include required attendance. This definition of parent involvement is somewhat comparable to measures of amount of time utilized in related research.

The relationship between parent involvement and twelve variables associated with families enrolled in the PCC-HS Program was assessed. The independent variables included six which were described in the literature review: age and level of education of mother, age and level of education of father, income of family, and family size. Four variables associated with hypotheses generated by the staff of the PCC-HS were included in this inquiry. The staff hypothesized that parents who participated in PCC became more involved and recorded more voluntary contact than parents who enrolled children in HS only. Also, PCC-HS coordinators postulated that families with



children with handicapping conditions who obtained special services through contact with the program volunteered more hours. Handicapping conditions included cerebral palsy, congenital deafness, Down's syndrome, epilepsy, delayed speech, and vision disorders. Four variables associated with these hypotheses were whether or not the mother had enrolled in PCC while pregnant, the number of children in the family who had been enrolled in PCC, the number of children in the family who had been enrolled in HS, and the number of children in the family with a handicapping condition.

Two additional variables were available and were included in this exploratory study. These were date of initial enrollment, which provided a measure of length of contact with the facility, and source of referral of the family to the program. The latter variable was categorized as self-referral or other-referral. It was hypothesized that parents who had been enrolled in the program for several years would participate more than newly enrolled parents, and that self-referred parents volunteered more hours than other-referred parents.

Hypotheses related to the six remaining variables were that no significant relationship would be found for parent volunteering and age of mother or father, level of education of mother or father, income of family, or size of family.

#### Method

##### Subjects

The population for this study consisted of 83 families who were enrolled in the Parent Child Center and Head Start (PCC-HS) Program in Leitchfield from September, 1977 through April, 1978. The study



site is located in a rural area in western Kentucky with a population of approximately 17,000. The staff have adhered to federal guidelines in enrolling primarily families with incomes below the poverty level. The income maximum may be exceeded by families with a handicapped child for 10% of the total enrollment.

Out of 83 families, 18 families were excluded from the sample because insufficient information was available or because the family was not enrolled during the entire eight month period. Data were analyzed for 65 families.

These 65 families consisted of 65 mothers or female guardians, 47 fathers or male guardians, and 121 children who have been enrolled in the Parent Child Center or the Head Start Program. The mean family size for this sample was 4.4 members.

#### Procedure

The data were obtained from records maintained by the program staff. All information was coded to provide confidentiality for the parents and children enrolled in the program. Separate record systems for PCC and HS were utilized in compiling variables associated with each family.

Data which were retrieved from intake forms and records maintained by the staff social worker included parents' date of birth, number of years of education, estimated family income, number of members of the family, whether the mother enrolled in PCC when pregnant, number of children in the family who had been enrolled in PCC, number of children in the family who had been enrolled in HS, whether there any children in the family with handicapping conditions, month and

year of first enrollment in either PCC or HS, and whether the family was referred from a community agency or was self-referred. Several estimates were available for some family incomes, in which case the most recent figure was recorded.

#### Statistical analysis

All data were recorded on computer cards for analysis with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences at Western Kentucky University Computer Center in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Frequencies were obtained for all thirteen variables. The mean rank of hours volunteered appeared to be a more useful measure of central tendency than mean number of hours because there were a large number of ties at the bottom of the range. The total number of hours volunteered by each parent was ranked, and Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance was performed to ascertain significant ( $p < .05$ ) relationships between the parent involvement variable and all other variables except income. Family size and total family income were used to create a range of per capita incomes. This range was split into a low low income group and a high low income group. The ranked volunteer hours for these two groups were also compared with a Kruskal-Wallis analysis.

#### Results

Thirteen variables were analyzed for 65 families in the Parent Child Center and Head Start (PCC-HS) Program in Leitchfield, Kentucky. Frequencies were obtained for the following variables: total number of hours volunteered over an eight month period by each parent, age of mother, age of father, level of education of mother, level of education of father, per capita income estimate for the family, family

size, whether any children in the family were handicapped, whether the family was self-referred or other-referred to the program, and the number of years the family had been in contact with the program. The frequency analyses provide descriptors of the study sample in terms of the variables examined.

The families enrolled included 65 mothers and 47 fathers. Of these parents, 46% of the mothers and 100% of the fathers recorded no voluntary involvement. The 35 mothers who recorded involvement ranged between 2 and 141 hours, with a group sum of 1,101 hours,  $\bar{M} = 16.94$ ,  $SD = 33.29$ . Appendix A provides frequencies of involvement totals for this sample which roughly clustered into three ranges: 37% of volunteering mothers recorded 2 to 10 hours, 51% recorded 12 to 62 hours, and 11% recorded 122 to 141 hours.

The total number of hours for each parent were ranked, and analyses of relationships between mean rank of this variable and the remaining twelve variables were conducted. Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance was used to ascertain if differences in degree of involvement existed in relation to the family variables examined. Results of these analyses, presented in the following tables, provided information about the degree of the relationship among variables obtained from the program records. Of the parent variables examined, two related significantly ( $p < .05$ ) to the number of hours volunteered. These variables, age of father and presence of a handicapped child in the family, are described in the following section.



### Age of Parents

Data were not available for all parents. Mothers who reported age (N = 39) ranged from 18 to 40 years, and fathers who reported age (N = 28) ranged from 20 to 56 years. These ranges were grouped for statistical analyses following the trimodal distribution. The percent of parents who were less than 26 years old, 26 to 35 years old, and 36 years old or older are grouped in Table 2.

Age of mother was not significantly related to degree of involvement,  $X^2 = 2.97$ ,  $p < .23$ . However, age of father was statistically relevant,  $X^2 = 9.42$ ,  $p < .009$ . Mothers whose co-parent was in the middle age range ranked highest in number of hours volunteered. Mean number of hours and mean ranks of hours are reported for each age group in Table 2.

### Level of Education of Parents

Data were not available for all parents. Of parents who reported level of education, 23% of the mothers and 17% of the fathers had high school diplomas. None of the parents reported any education beyond high school. Analyses of the sample for whom data were available yielded no significant difference of mean rank hours volunteered for parents with differing levels of education. The percent, mean hours, and mean ranks of volunteering relative to level of education of mother and father are presented in Table 3.

### Per Capita Income Estimate

Total family income and family size were combined as a ratio. Three families in the study sample were excluded from this analysis: a family whose income was not reported, a family who reported zero

Table 2

Parent Volunteering Relative to Age Group of Mother and Father

Age	Mother			Father		
	%	Mean Hours	Mean Rank*	%	Mean Hours	Mean Rank**
26	54	20	18	36	12	30
26-35	36	29	24	43	38	47
35	10	31	15	21	60	31
Total N = 39 <sup>a</sup>			Total N = 28 <sup>b</sup>			

Note: Only mothers recorded volunteer hours. Fathers' data are in relationship to mothers' volunteering.

<sup>a</sup>Data were missing for 26 (40%) of the mothers.

<sup>b</sup>Data were missing for 19 (40%) of the fathers.

\* $\chi^2 = 2.975, p < .23.$

\*\* $\chi^2 = 9.42, p < .009.$

Table 3

Parent Volunteering Relative to Level of Education of Mother and Father

Level of Education	Mother			Father		
	%	Mean Hours	Mean Rank*	%	Mean Hours	Mean Rank**
8th grade	10	36	18	39	25	32
8-11th	67	22	16	44	30	41
high school diploma	23	24	13	17	5	29
	N = 31 <sup>a</sup>			N = 23 <sup>b</sup>		

<sup>a</sup>Data were missing for 34 (52%) of the mothers.

<sup>b</sup>Data were missing for 24 (51%) of the fathers.

\* $\chi^2 = 1.0$ ,  $p < .60$ .

\*\* $\chi^2 = 2.35$ ,  $p < .31$ .



income, and a family whose per capita income estimate was \$8,000. Per capita income ranged from \$180 to \$2,507 for 62 families.

A median split of this sample yielded 31 families with per capita incomes between \$180 and \$828 (low low income) and 31 families with per capita incomes between \$832 and \$2,507 (high low income). Mean number of hours for the two groups were 24 and 10 respectively. There was no significant difference between the low and high group in mean rank hours volunteered,  $\chi^2 = .05$ ,  $p < .82$ .

#### Family Size

Family size ranged from single parents with one child to two parent families with more than four children. The mean family size was 4.4 members. Percent of families of different sizes is reported in Table 4.

Mean number of hours and mean rank of hours by family size is also reported in Table 4. The mean rank hours volunteered was not significantly related to family size,  $\chi^2 = 2.06$ ,  $p < .72$ .

#### Mother Enrolled in PCC When Pregnant

One-third of the mothers in the study sample enrolled in PCC when they were pregnant. These mothers volunteered an average of 40 hours. The mean for the other two-thirds of the mothers was 29 hours. The mean rank hours for these two groups, 31 and 34 respectively, do not differ significantly,  $\chi^2 = .42$ ,  $p < .52$ .

#### Children Enrolled in PCC and HS

In these 65 families, 121 children have been enrolled in either PCC or HS. Some of these children have been in both. The percent of

Table 4  
Parent Volunteering Relative to Family Size

Number of Family Members	% of Total	Mean Hours	Mean Ranks <sup>*</sup>
2	8	10	30
3	20	17	36
4	31	23	35
5	20	6	28
6	22	20	32

\* $\chi^2 = 2.06, p < .72.$

families enrolling different numbers of children at the time of this study is presented in Table 5.

Twenty-four families enrolled no children in PCC. These families did not differ significantly from families who had one or more children in PCC. Thirty-three families had enrolled no children in HS. These families did not differ significantly in level of involvement from families who had one or more children enrolled in HS. The total number of children enrolled in either PCC or HS was not significantly related to level of volunteering of parents. Mean number of hours and mean ranks for different numbers of children enrolled in PCC and HS are included in Table 5.

#### Handicapped Children

Approximately 30% (N = 19) of these families had one or more children with a handicapping condition. This variable was significantly related to the index of parent involvement. The mean number of hours volunteered by mothers of handicapped children was 31, and the mean for mothers with no handicapped children was 11. The mean ranks for these two groups were 40 and 30 respectively,  $\chi^2 = 4.05$ ,  $p < .04$ .

#### Source of Referral

The staff recruited 50 families (77%) who were enrolled during the eight months considered for this study. Fifteen families (23%) approached the staff and applied for enrollment. These two groups were compared in terms of mean number of hours volunteered as well as mean rank of volunteering. The mean number of hours volunteered by the recruited and self-referred group were 5 and 21 respectively.



Table 5  
 Parent Volunteering Relative to Number of Children  
 Enrolled in PCC and HS

Number of Children in Family Who Have Been Enrolled	Parent Child Center			Head Start		
	%	Mean Hour	Mean Rank <sup>*</sup>	%	Mean Hour	Mean Rank <sup>**</sup>
0	37	12	31	51	16	32
1	48	14	31	32	8	31
2	12	46	47	14	37	39
3	3	3	27	2	62	61
4	0	-	-	2	0	16

Note: Total N = 65 families.

\* $\chi^2 = 5.78$ ,  $p < .12$ .

\*\* $\chi^2 = 4.91$ ,  $p < .30$ .

Mean ranks for the two groups were 35 and 26 respectively,  $X^2 = 2.88$ ,  $p < .09$ . This difference was not within the range of significance adopted for this study.

#### Length of Contact with the Program

The families enrolled during the eight months of this inquiry had initially contacted the past five years. The percentage of families enrolled from one to five years is listed in Table 6. Families who enrolled in the program five years ago volunteered more time than families who had enrolled any year since. The relationship between number of years of contact with the program and mean rank of the rest of the group in terms of volunteering was not significant,  $X^2 = 7.57$ ,  $p < .109$ .

Table 6  
 Parent Volunteering Relative to Number of Years of Contact  
 With the Program

Number of Years of Contact	%	Mean Hours	Mean Rank <sup>*</sup>
1	8	9	32
2	31	9	33
3	25	7	27
4	22	23	31
5	15	44	46

\* $\chi^2 = 7.57, p < .109.$



## Discussion

This investigation yielded information on several dimensions. First, descriptive statistics were obtained for 65 families who were enrolled in the Leitchfield PCC-HS Program between September 1, 1977 and April 30, 1978. Differences among parents who varied in the number of hours they volunteered to be involved were then assessed. Implications of this study and suggestions for program modifications to enhance the quantity and quality of parent-staff relationships were offered to the coordinators of the Leitchfield Program in concluding this report.

The data suggested that staff members were successfully establishing contact with about 50% of the families they serve. Specifically, 35 mothers from 65 families recorded 2 to 141 voluntary hours at the facility over an eight month period. Variables which were not predictive of involvement totals included age of mother, level of education of mother and father, per capita income estimate, family size, enrollment in either PCC or HS exclusively, number of children enrolled in the combined program, source of referral, and length of contact with the program staff. The mothers who were involved represented all categories in the analyses of these variables in relation to total hours recorded on the Parent Involvement Activity Record.

Although no fathers recorded volunteer time, age of male parent was significantly associated with amount of time volunteered by mothers. Women who were most involved in their child's educational program appeared to be those with a co-parent between 25 and 36 years of age. The findings suggested that fathers may be involved in a

supportive role. Involvement may be related to needs and concerns of men at various stages in their lives. Troll (1975) reported that "early fatherhood (under age 24) is associated with role strains and discomfort; lateness (age 33 and older) with more self-possession and comfort in the role" (p. 102). Such development may interact with characteristics of these fathers such as level of income, job security, family stability, and regional factors.

The PIAR may have resulted in an inaccurate estimate of father participation in the program. This measure may have been insensitive to a variety of involvement activities. Perhaps program involvement options were not visible to fathers, or were not scheduled at convenient times. Further research might focus on clarification and reinforcement of the role of fathers in their children's development.

A second variable which was significantly related to parent involvement was the presence of a handicapped child in the family. The data supported the staff hypothesis that efforts to involve these parents were successful. Level of volunteering might correspond to heightened concern of these parents in response to the special needs of their children. Mackie (1968) contended that many handicapped children do not have access to suitable educational opportunities, and thus another explanation of the results is that the PCC-HS Program provided these parents with services they could not obtain elsewhere in the community. All handicapped children who were enrolled in PCC-HS received assistance in procuring special services including diagnosis, therapy, transportation, and special

equipment, in addition to services provided to all children. Because income guidelines were waived for families with handicapped children, this group of parents may have differed from other families in the the study in general level of income. This could be assessed in further analyses of the data.

A second hypothesis developed in discussions among program coordinators, that source of referral would be significantly related to involvement, was not supported. The data refuted the hypothesis that families who were motivated to enroll in the program were more involved than families who were recruited by the staff. The majority of the families in this sample, 77%, were contacted by the staff and recruited into the program over a five year period. Perhaps the orientation for these two groups differed such that recruited enrollees were more successfully integrated into involvement activities than had been realized.

The third hypothesis considered in this inquiry was that enrollment in PCC would be associated with greater volunteering. Analysis of involvement of mothers who enrolled in PCC when pregnant or with their child, 63%, compared with involvement of mothers who enrolled in HS but not in PCC, 37%, revealed no significant relationship. The separation of these two programs at the administrative level may be less evident to the parents than to the staff. Further statistical analysis might include distinguishing between effects of enrollment in PCC and length of contact with the program.

In general it appeared that parents who recorded volunteer time at the Leitchfield PCC-HS Program included only mothers, whose age,



level of education, family income, and family size were not predictive of involvement. Demographic variables did not appear to be useful in assessing characteristics of involved parents. Involvement may have been related to the orientation procedure employed the year the family was enrolled in the program, or to the selection process followed by the staff the year the family entered. In this investigation involvement was related to age of father and to the presence of a handicapped child in the family.

Further statistical analyses may reveal nonlinear relationships between number of hours volunteered and length of contact with the staff. Additional research could be conducted with the modal ranges of involvement; that is, the group of parents who volunteered no hours, those who recorded two to ten hours, those who recorded 12 to 66 hours, and those who recorded 122 to 141 total hours during the eight month period may represent four distinctive groups of parents.

Several limitations of these data and the method employed in the investigation have been considered. The findings of this study were based on data embedded in the records maintained by the PCC-HS staff. No information was available regarding the reliability of the data which were recorded by staff and parents. Use of archival data eliminated bias to some extent; however, the time-consuming process of coding information from records which were not designed for computer analysis contributed to the uncertainty of reliable outcomes. Also, parents may have forgotten to record volunteer time, or misunderstood the types of activities which they were to record. The location of the forms in the building may have led to systematic bias in that

activities in the same room were recorded and activities which occurred elsewhere were not. Systematic planning for gathering data would enhance the value of records for evaluation research.

Another limitation of this study is that parent involvement among these parents was not comparable to parent involvement reported in other studies because different definitions of the term were used. The conviction of Havighurst and Davis (1955), that "the interview is not nearly so good as participant observation for securing data both on the behavior and attitudes of parents toward their children" (p. 442), provides support for the use of the PIAR integrated into involvement activities such that staff members observe parents as they record their volunteer hours. A major advantage of the PIAR is that it is available to Parent Child Centers and Head Start programs throughout the country and would be useful for comparing information obtained from different samples.

Future research might be predicated on a definition of parent involvement developed to address specific concerns of the staff. In addition to recording the amount of time parents choose to volunteer to the program, staff members and parents could describe the quality of involvement in concrete terms which might facilitate synthesis of separate studies. Willmon (1969) combined both quantitative and qualitative descriptions of her subjects, which provided a broader understanding of parent involvement than can be achieved with a simple index of number of hours volunteered. It would be useful for researchers who involved parents at any point during a study to report an operational definition of involvement, and to describe

sampling procedures and incentives employed. Information about parents who decline to participate could be obtained through observation and interviews. An understanding of needs of uninvolved parents may be of critical value for staff who want to see more of their services being utilized.

A theoretical basis for parent involvement and uninvolved parents could lead to program modifications which could be evaluated by parents and staff. Measures of satisfaction with the day-to-day process and longitudinal records of child variables could be planned as research products. The method which was utilized for this investigation can be developed to explore questions such as these: Are parents more likely to be involved in activities which meet their individual needs for social and recreational relationships? Does access to transportation correspond to involvement? Is parent involvement related to developmental stages of children? Are there significant relationships within families or with others in the community that preclude or support parent involvement? How do involved parents contrast to uninvolved parents in their perceptions of the program and staff? Is there an optimal time and medium for publicizing activities for parents? Are attitudes about parents' roles and responsibilities shared by staff and uninvolved parents? Research which addresses questions such as these will provide a means of developing programs for families and theories related to parent involvement.

This investigation yielded four kinds of information for the program staff: their hypotheses concerning parent involvement in their program were addressed; descriptive statistics were obtained



for a sample from the population of parents they serve, a model for self-directed evaluation and exploratory research was demonstrated; and specific suggestions for the staff to consider in their efforts to promote parent involvement were developed.

Tentative conclusions regarding characteristics of parents who were involved in the Leitchfield PCC-HS Program were: parents of handicapped children were among the most involved; participation in the Parent Child Center was not associated with greater involvement than participation in Head Start only; and parents who initiated contact with the PCC-HS staff did not volunteer more time than parents who were recruited by the staff. The significance of fathers' age as a correlate of greater involvement of mothers warrants further investigation. No other variables were identified as significant characteristics of highly involved parents.

#### Recommendations

Two general strengths of the Leitchfield PCC-HS Program provide a foundation for the recommendations which follow. First, relationships between children and their teachers and among the staff were generally warm and positive. Second, the role of the social worker has been integrated into the program over a period of many years. This individual provided most one-to-one contact with parents during orientation to the program. These two aspects of the program complement each other, and it was recommended that the full staff develop and implement parent involvement activities.

The following suggestions are related to four facets of the program: planning modifications in staff activities to accommodate

parent involvement, orienting parents to the program, developing the program to encourage parent involvement, and planning specific activities for staff to be with parents.

The first suggestion is for individual staff members to consider potential changes in their jobs if parents begin participating more actively. If the coordinators choose to initiate a program to increase parent involvement, they will want also to plan to provide parents with continuing support. The implications of an increase in staff responsibility include scheduling activities for parent convenience and utilizing parent time effectively. In response to parent involvement, the staff as a group may wish to provide further training for themselves, such as workshops in value clarification, interpersonal sensitivity, and listening skills, and by role-playing family problem situations.

Secondly, a well-planned parent orientation program can enhance the quality and quantity of parent involvement. The initial emphasis would be on the quality of relationships between staff members and the family. The social worker can begin by identifying parent needs which could be met through parent involvement activities, such as sharing transportation to school functions, exchanging clothing, and planning recreational activities with and without children. The staff can describe specific involvement opportunities, and explore on an individual basis potential activities for each parent. It might be useful, when children first enter the program, to encourage parents to make decisions which center around identifying the needs of their children.

An additional recommendation is that the staff develop a specific definition of parent involvement, reasonable goals, activities and time lines for themselves. Some activities which may facilitate parent involvement include identifying resources within the family and the community which can be shared, parents with common needs and interests (single parents, teenage parents, parents who live near each other), needs of the teachers (painting rooms, chaperoning field trips, providing snacks), and children with specific goals (toilet training, entering elementary school). The staff could develop frequent means of letting parents know that they are appreciated.

Finally, parent involvement can be encouraged by incorporating parents in ongoing program activities, such as serving on the school board and joining discussions to provide solutions to school problems. They can be invited individually to tell stories to groups of children or to guide a small group around their work environment. Special activities can be scheduled for whole families, such as picnics or breakfasts at the center. Parents might want to contribute and share in food preparation. The staff can provide transportation, refreshments, child care and a friendly attitude for parent meetings. Also, teachers can involve children in group projects to acknowledge parent efforts, such as producing and erecting a large colorful sign thanking parents. Parents in the community who have been successful as child educators can be invited to work with teachers and parents as models and consultants.

A bibliography of resources for promoting parent involvement (see Appendix B) can provide other ideas. In addition, the staff of



the Leitchfield PCC-HS Program may consult with personnel in the Head Start Technical Services regional office in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

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## Appendix A

## Frequencies and Percents of Parents Volunteering Hours

Total Hours	Number of Parents	Percent
0	30	46.0
2	1	1.5
3	3	4.6
4	1	1.5
5	4	6.2
6	1	1.5
8	1	1.5
9	1	1.5
10	1	1.5
12	1	1.5
13	2	3.1
15	1	1.5
16	1	1.5
21	2	3.1
22	1	1.5
25	1	1.5
29	1	1.5
30	1	1.5
32	1	1.5
35	1	1.5
36	1	1.5
38	1	1.5
41	1	1.5
62	1	1.5
122	1	1.5
136	1	1.5
140	1	1.5
141	1	1.5

## Appendix B

## Parent Involvement Resource Bibliography

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