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The Relationship Between Parent Education and Their Child's Academic Readiness

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The Relationship Between Parent Education and Their Child's Academic Readiness

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Abstract
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The purpose of the current study was to investigate the relationship between parents' education level and their child's academic readiness. The following research question was examined: Is there a relationship between the level of parents' education and their child's academic readiness? In this study, Marshall University Graduate College (MUGC) and West Virginia University (WVU) graduate students collected data from randomly selected children attending West Virginia Educare (WVE) sites. The results of this study indicated there was no significant correlation between parents' education level and their child's academic readiness, generally believed to be highly correlated. Conclusions and recommendations for future research were discussed.

Dedication

This research paper is dedicated to all my loved ones, past and present, who have kept me going through many years of ups and downs in education. Thank you for constantly pushing me a little further . . .

Acknowledgements

A word of thanks to my thesis committee, Dr. Libby Boyles, Dr. Joyce Meikamp, and Dr. Fred Krieg for their guidance and support. A thank you to my colleagues for helping me stay motivated and in assisting me in understanding what I am writing, why and how. A special word of thanks to my committee chair, Dr. Libby Boyles, for her constant support and devotion to the Educare project and to our present and future education.

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Introduction to Review of Literature

As more women join the workforce, the demand for education and care for their children is rapidly increasing. Early childhood education plays a large role in guiding the development of young children as they move from their home and family out into the larger social world. Committing resources to early childhood development is imperative to making any real progress in education, crime reduction, debt reduction, and economic development (UNICEF, 2001). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), participating in early childhood education programs such as Headstart, nursery school, prekindergarten, and kindergarten can better prepare a child to enter first grade. Many policymakers and educators believe that it is important to help all children start elementary school on an equal footing with other children. Involving students in preprimary programs beginning at earlier ages may provide these students with valuable experiences that will help them start elementary school better prepared to learn (NCES, 1999).

Early childhood education, also called prekindergarten, experiences were once called nursery schools. This term is still used today and is generally interchangeable with preschool. Preschools are schools that provide programs for children who are younger than kindergarten age, typically between the ages of two and five, and provide programs that contribute to giving quality care, socialization, enrichment, play, and education (Herman, 1998).

Recently, understanding of the importance of the preschool years to later

development of a child's social, cognitive, language and motor skills has grown (Herman 1998). Preschool programs include opportunities for children to learn concepts in group settings that they often do not receive at home. Children in preschool have the advantage over children that do not attend preschool by being able to learn with other children their age, in a group setting, while participating in educational activities and other learning experiences that will benefit them for later education. Many academic skills are learned in preschool. Children can develop their fine and gross motor skills while implementing creative thinking skills by playing with blocks, clay, crayons, water, and/or dolls.

Other goals and skills to reach during preschool include developing each child's knowledge of objects, skills in the arts, and comfort with the physical movement, development of each child's ability to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings and to speak about, dramatize, and graphically represent experiences in order to communicate them to others (Hechinger, 1986). Preschool knowledge is created to provide social and cognitive enrichment during early childhood development. The goal of this knowledge is to further children's abilities to successfully make the transition to higher education in the future and hopefully prevent poor school adjustment outcomes resulting from such factors as poverty, school failure, and unemployment (Lunenburg, 2000).

Childcare and Poverty

The children at greatest risk for not achieving academically are those who grow up in poverty. Children from low-income families are most at risk of failing academically due to more often being exposed to violence, unhealthy living conditions, and drug abuse (FDCH, 2000). Historically, early childhood education has been viewed as a way to better the life chances of children born into poverty. Young children who are

at greater risk of school failure are more likely to succeed in school if they attend a well-planned, high-quality, early childhood program (FDCH, 2001). Early education has been seen as a viable intervention strategy for disadvantaged children. Interest in early education is linked to renewed concern for the scope and effects of poverty on children. According to NCES in 1999, preliminary enrollment rates for three, four, and five-year-old children were higher in 1996 than in 1991. In 1996, 37% of three-year-olds, 58% of four-year-olds, and 90% of five-year-olds were enrolled in preprimary education. Three and four-year-olds from families with incomes of more than $50,000 were more likely than three and four-year-olds from families with income of $50,000 or less to be enrolled in preprimary education (NCES, 1999).

Todd Heffernan stated in 1997 that early educational experiences have been found to be particularly important for children growing up in an atmosphere of poverty. Such children are in particular need of preparation for entry into primary-level schooling. Enrollment in preprimary education programs assist these children by introducing them to modes of social behavior that will be expected in later learning situations and by preparing them to be receptive to new concepts they will encounter (Heffernan,1997).

At present, one in four youngsters live in poverty and only one-third of three and four-year-old children receive preschool or childcare services (Kagan,1987). As of 1997, 21% of children in the United States live in poverty (“Kids Count,” 2000). Preschool programs for young children living in poverty have demonstrated the promise of lasting benefits. Several studies, as reported in the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies (CLS), found that significantly fewer children that attended preschool programs than children that did not attend preschool programs were ever placed in special education classes nor

were ever retained in a grade.

Childcare in West Virginia

According to Kids Count 2000, on a state level, West Virginia contains 100,758 children between the ages of zero to four-years-old, with 36,170 (34.0%) of West Virginia's children living in poverty. In the United States a four person family median income is $43,400, while West Virginia's median income is $31,900; nationally 66% of children under six-years-old have working parents and of West Virginia's children under the age of six, 49% have working parents; the percentage of children under thirteen living in low income families is 21% nationally and 17% in West Virginia ("Kids Count," 2000).

According to West Virginia Demographics, there are four hundred licensed child care centers in West Virginia. One-fifth of West Virginia children, under the age of five, attend a preschool program, such as Headstart, public school, prekindergarten, or any other type of licensed child care center ("Governor's Cabinet on Children and Families" (GCCF), 2000). Children who receive a center based program with low adult to child ratios and sFigure professional staff with educational curriculum are more successful than their peers on almost every measure.

An area where West Virginia does not match up in quality child care programs in comparison to national child care programs is evidenced by ratio of caregivers to infants in West Virginia is 1:4; quality standard is 1:3 ("Child Care in West Virginia" (CCWV), 1999). The median hourly wages of child care workers nationally is $6.61 while in West Virginia it is $5.94; nationally preschool teachers hourly wage is $8.32, West Virginia is $8.21 ("Kids Count," 2000). West Virginia licensing and/or certification standards

require no training prior to service, and there isn't any coordinated program to provide the training, which leaves West Virginia's childcare programs inadequate (CCWV, 1999).

Providing affordable, high-quality child care programs where they are needed in areas with the highest concentrations of low income families helps parents and also contributes back to the community. Early childhood education can have a powerful influence on poor children that lasts into adulthood (CCWV, 1999).

West Virginia Educare

According to the West Virginia Office of Social Services (WVOSS), while in office, Governor Cecil Underwood announced an $18.6 million expansion of the child day care program operated by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR). Beginning of October 1, 2000, DHHR increased rates paid to child daycare providers for subsidized care. DHHR also increased the number of families eligible for financial assistance with childcare by increasing financial eligibility guidelines to 200% of the 1999 federal poverty level. In addition to the rate increase in eligibility, DHHR implemented incentive rates for providers in January 2001 for providers who meet higher standards of care who receive special infant and toddler training (WVOSS, 2000). One of the goals of the West Virginia's Governor's Cabinet on Children and Families is to make children education and their families one of West Virginia's highest priorities (GCCF, 2000). Their mission is to enhance the ability of families to protect, nurture, educate, and support the development of their children so each child's full potential is achieved (GCCF, 2000).

The Cabinet is supporting several current programs to benefit children in West

Virginia such as 1) Starting Point Centers are early childhood centers encouraging the development of an integrated service system for young children and families with young children, 2) Governor's Early Childhood Implementation Commission, also known as Family ABC's (Action to Benefit Children), is made up of consumers, local providers, and state agency program directors; it is appointed by the Governor and oversees the states efforts to improve services for young children and their families, and 3) West Virginia Educare (WVE), the goal of the Educare initiatives is to promote the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills of young children so that they might succeed in kindergarten and later in life; WVE is being recommended by the Study Commission on Services for Young Children (GCCF, 2000). WVE's program goal is to provide quality experiences for children by requiring developmentally appropriate curriculum, appropriate staff-to-child ratios, limited group size, flexible full and part-time programs, and meaningful family involvement. According to the Educare Initiative, they are seeking to improve preschool opportunities for children under five. It would establish standards for quality early learning programs and provide additional funding to programs that meet those standards. WVE builds on current early childhood programs and policies to enhance, rather than replace, existing services. Enrollment in WVE programs would be voluntary and available to any West Virginia child on a full or part-time basis (WVE, 2001). Educare can be in public schools, Headstart centers, private preschools, Birth to 3 programs, and childcare programs that are family and center based. Educare programs link families to other services needed such as mental health, adult education, transportation, healthcare, nutrition, therapy, and transition to kindergarten (WVE, 2001). "Educare is an initiative that benefits not only children and families, but also West

Virginia as a whole. Because Educare programs are designed to improve a child's ability to achieve in the future, Educare is a workforce development issue as well as a family issue" (GCCF, 2000, p. 2).

Emphasis of Early Childhood Education

"The issue of school readiness is a matter of national significance and has been mandated as a national educational goal in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994) (P.L. 103-227): "By the year 2000 all children in America will start school ready to learn" (Sacks, 2001, p. 188). According to Bernard, in 1997, large numbers of children today arrive at school unprepared to cope with pressures of the curriculum and unprepared to cope with the pressures of growing up (1997). In addition, the emotional and learning needs of the children are far greater and more complex than ever before. As a consequence, underachievement may well be on it's way to becoming the norm rather than the exception (Bernard, 1997). Parents are often unsure of whether their child is academically ready to attend school. If a child is between the ages of two and three-years-old and appears to be physically and emotionally ready for preschool, bored at home, enjoys being with other children, and is willing to be away from their parent for short periods of time then theses are signs that a child is ready to attend school. "Children's thinking is affected by their personal experiences or environment and their stage of development loosely defined by the child's chronological age. A child's stage of development and personal experiences set the limits of learning" (Johnson, 1985, p. 57). The Child Care Bulletin, in 2000, states the relationship between academic readiness to later academic performance can be correlated by quality daycare from infancy. As stated earlier, quality daycare clearly has positive effects on children's intellectual, verbal, and

cognitive development; especially when children would otherwise experience impoverished and relatively unstimulating home environments. Care of poor quality may have deleterious effects ("Child Care Bulletin", 2000). Long term findings of observations of classroom quality obtained annually over a three year period were used to predict that the quality of child care during the first three years was related to children's school readiness, expressive language, and receptive language leading to later academic achievement ("Child Care Bulletin," 2000). An underlying assumption of readiness is that it is an internal condition that will emerge naturally in children. Readiness has often been poorly defined, and open to interpretations. Confusion over readiness makes it difficult to conclude what factors differentiate a child who is 'ready' from one who is not, to be able to provide resources needed to insure children will academically benefit from educational opportunities (Panter, 1998).

Parents and Education

One of the most important factors in academic readiness is the role of the parent. "No matter what age of the child, parents are the most important influences over a child's achievement in school - even more important than peer group or teachers. Parent involvement in education and their encouragement of their child directly influences the extent to which their child excels at school" (Bernard, 1997, p. 18). With regard to academic achievement, it is estimated that at least one-third of the development at age eighteen has taken place prior to the child's entrance into the first grade. Much of the variation in children at the beginning of first grade can be attributed to variations in the home environment (Bloom, 1981, p. 72). Parents are children's first, most significant, and most influential teachers. The seminal lessons taught in the home stay with children

as they make their way through school, shaping their interests, ideals, and enthusiasm for learning (Bennett, Cribb, and Finn, 1999). A child's academic readiness and achievement relies heavily upon the time a parent devotes to their child's education. Many children lack school readiness because of the lack of parental support that extends throughout their schooling.

Bloom, in 1981, stated there is often a curriculum and teaching style in each home such that it is the variations in this home curriculum and teaching which can account for many of the differences in a child's readiness for learning the tasks in school. The curriculum may be analyzed in terms of its provisions for general learning, the models and help it provides language development and social interaction, and the stimulation and concern it provides for achievement and learning on the part of the child. "It is the adults in the home who serve to stimulate the child's intellectual development and it is the adults in the home who determine the basic readiness of the child for later academic achievement" (Bloom,1981, p. 77). Parental isolation has been connected with decreased cognitive abilities in children from eight months old, behavior dilemmas among five to eight year olds, lower IQ scores in four-years-old, and greater likelihood of child abuse (Sacks, 2001). Infants born to mothers without a formal education are more likely to die before their first birthday than babies born to mothers that have at least a post secondary education. Educated mothers raise healthier children and families, are more able to provide security and support, and engage in greater verbal interaction with their preschool-aged children which helps the children develop their own language and literacy skills (UNICEF, 2001).

Family environment affects many aspects of a child's life, including academic

readiness and achievement. "Research has shown that family characteristics such as parent's educational attainment are related to student achievement" (NCES, 2000, p. 1). "There was a positive relationship between parents' educational attainment and the enrollment rates of three and four-year-olds: as parents' educational attainment increased, so did the preprimary enrollment rates of their children. However, enrollment rates of five-year-olds were similar, regardless of their parent's educational attainment" (NCES, 1999, p. 1). Studies have shown that children are better prepared to learn when they are read to and told stories. In 1996, children ages three to five whose parents' highest education level was a bachelor's degree or higher were more likely to have been read to at least three times a week compared to children whose parents' highest education level was a high school diploma or GED (NCES, 1998). About half of children in high quality schools come from households where the average education exceeds high school, while about one-third of students from low quality schools come from households the average education exceeds high school (NCES (Issue Brief), 1998).

Purpose of study

The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between parent education and their child's academic readiness.

Hypothesis

Parent education level has an impact on their child's academic readiness and the two will be significantly and positively correlated.

Method

Subjects

In West Virginia, 10% of children attending Educare programs were randomly selected as study subjects. For the purpose of this study, a total of forty children were randomly selected, twenty-two males and eighteen females. The children were tested ranging between the ages of two-years and six months old to four-years, seven months and fourteen days old and had data containing mother and father education level.

Instruments

Each child was administered the Bracken Basic Concept Scale-Revised (Bracken-R). The Bracken-R is a brief and easily administered scale designed to assess concept acquisition and receptive language skills. It is intended to be used with children two and a half through seven years old. There are three components in the Bracken-R: The Examiners Manual, a Stimulus Manual, and a Record Form for recording and scoring responses. There are eleven subtests on the Bracken-R measuring understanding of the following: Colors, Letters, Numbers/Counting, Sizes, Comparisons, Shapes, Direction/Position, Self-/Social Awareness, Texture/Material, Quantity and Time/Sequence. The Bracken-R produces standard scores with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. The first six subtests are treated as a composite scale, School readiness Composite (SRC), and are scored together. The remaining subtests are individually scored.

Procedure

During an estimated two month testing period, 10% of the randomly selected experimental subjects in West Virginia Educare pilot study were individually evaluated and assessed using the Bracken-R, PPVT, ECERS-R, and Carolina Curriculum as a part of a larger study. For the current study, the School readiness Composite (SRC) from the Bracken-R was used to assess the relationship between parent education level, identified during parent phone interview after testing, and their child's academic readiness. The tests were administered and scored by a graduate student from MUGC or WVU. Later a graduate student telephoned the parent with child's test results and requested information from the parent by including the level of education the mother and father attained, number in household, and yearly household income. The research question addressed during this study was: Is there a relationship between parent education and their child's academic readiness?

Results

The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between parent education and their child's academic readiness. After using data that was collected from the Educare initiative using the School Readiness Composite from subtests 1-6 of the Bracken Basic Concept Scale-Revised (Bracken-R)and from the protocol of multiple questions asked to the parents including education level based on; less than high school, GED, high school diploma, two-year college or technical college degree, four-year college degree, graduate degree, specialized vocational training, and /or specialized military training, all data was entered into the Comprehensive Statistical Software Program (SPSS) 10.0 version. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to note any significance of the data sets relationship between parent education and their child's academic readiness (see Figure 1 and 2).

Results of the study indicated that the relationship between parent education and their child's academic readiness had no significant correlation. The data of the mothers' education and relationship to their child's academic readiness showed a nonsignificant negative correlation of ($r = -.230$) and ($p = .153$) (see Table 1). The fathers' relationship to their child's academic readiness showed a nonsignificant positive correlation as in ($r= .131$) and ($p=.420$) (see Table 1). The study results indicated that parent education had no significant correlation with their child's academic readiness.

Discussion

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between parent education and their child's academic readiness. The hypothesis of this study was that there was a significant correlation between parent education and their child's academic readiness. The following question was examined in this study: Is there a relationship between parent education and their child's academic readiness? The results of the study indicated that there was no significant correlation between parent education and their child's academic readiness.

Discussion

Variables not considered in this study might possibly lead to a better understanding of the finding that there was no significant correlation of the relationship between parent education and their child's academic readiness.

A variable to consider is a low educated, poverty family could receive subsidized government funding which would make the child qualify for Headstart, and has a more stimulating environment while at school leading to higher academic readiness.

A second variable to consider would be the possibility that some parents do not receive higher education and often want their child to achieve more than they do in life which could lead to helping motivate their child to further their education.

The last variable to consider is restriction of range. The study showed an

unusually high level of education among the West Virginia Educare parents, which was unexpected due to the high poverty and low education often associated with West Virginia families.

The results of the study could have been underestimated due to the fact that some parents could not be reached, therefore no information was collected. When a parent was reached some were resistant in self-reporting their education level, leading to the question on whether the parents were being honest about their education level.

West Virginia daycares were the only daycares tested during this study, which could lead to poverty issues to be examined and the differences in rural and urban living.

Recommendations

Although the present study did not consider the variables discussed above, this study serves a purpose in that it leads to other extraneous variables, listed above, that can be used for further research and be compared to previous studies that do show such a relationship.

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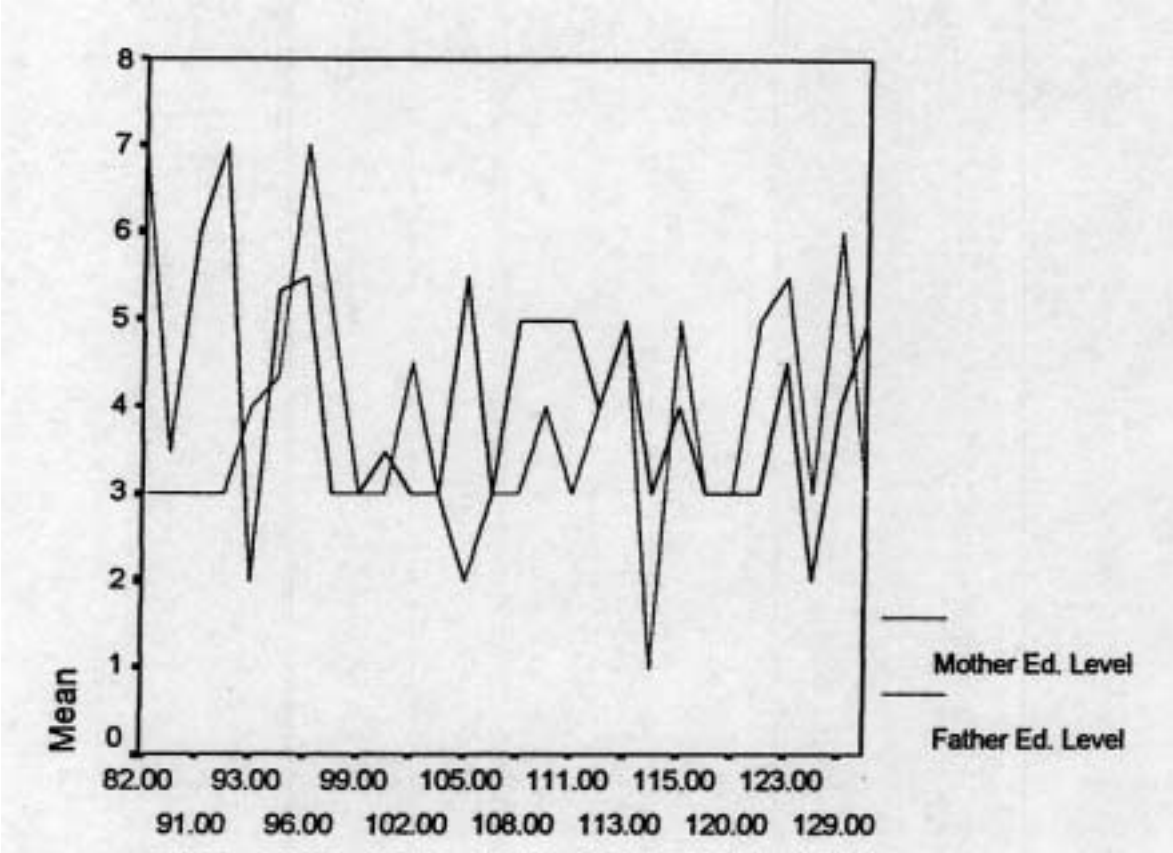
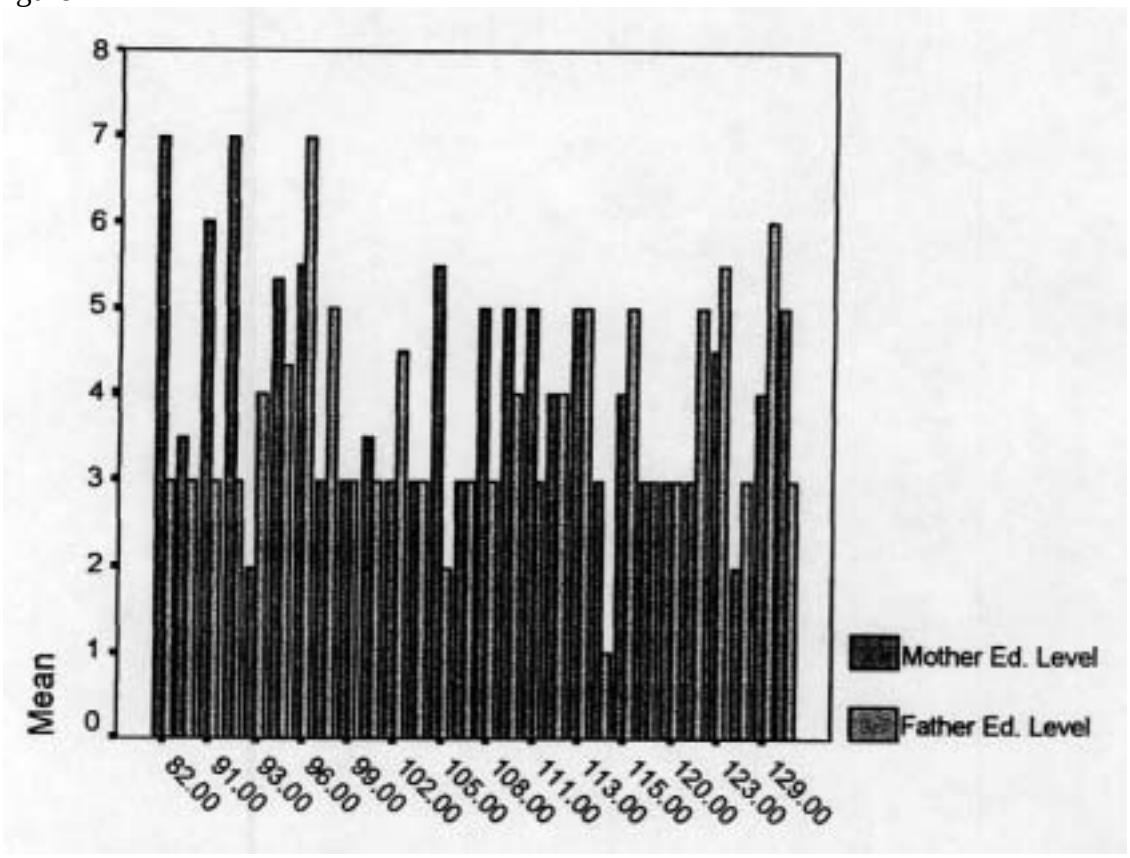
Appendix A

Figure 1



SRC Composite Standard

Figure 2



SRC Composite Standard

Appendix B

Correlations

Figure 1

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SRC Composite	40	12	75	39.90	18.86
Mother Ed. Level	40	2	7	4.15	1.46
Father Ed. Level	40	1	7	3.92	1.51
Valid N (listwise)	40				

Figure 2

Correlations

		SRC Composite Standard	Mother Ed. Level	Father Ed. Level
SRC Composite Standard	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.230	.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.153	.420
	N	40	40	40
Mother Ed. Level	Pearson Correlation	-.230	1.000	.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.153	.	.499
	N	40	40	40
Father Ed. Level	Pearson Correlation	.131	.110	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.420	.499	.
	N	40	40	40

Frequencies
Figure 3

Statistics

		SRC Composite	Mother Ed. Level	Father Ed. Level
N	Valid	40	40	40
	Missing	0	0	0

Figure 4

SRC Composite

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	12	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	13	1	2.5	2.5	5.0
	15	1	2.5	2.5	7.5
	16	1	2.5	2.5	10.0
	17	1	2.5	2.5	12.5
	18	1	2.5	2.5	15.0
	19	2	5.0	5.0	20.0
	22	2	5.0	5.0	25.0
	23	1	2.5	2.5	27.5
	25	1	2.5	2.5	30.0
	26	2	5.0	5.0	35.0
	29	1	2.5	2.5	37.5
	32	1	2.5	2.5	40.0
	35	2	5.0	5.0	45.0
	36	2	5.0	5.0	50.0
	37	1	2.5	2.5	52.5
	40	1	2.5	2.5	55.0
	44	2	5.0	5.0	60.0
	45	1	2.5	2.5	62.5
	46	1	2.5	2.5	65.0
	49	1	2.5	2.5	67.5
	51	1	2.5	2.5	70.0
	54	1	2.5	2.5	72.5
	58	1	2.5	2.5	75.0
	60	2	5.0	5.0	80.0
	61	1	2.5	2.5	82.5
	62	2	5.0	5.0	87.5
	64	1	2.5	2.5	90.0
	65	1	2.5	2.5	92.5
	71	1	2.5	2.5	95.0
	72	1	2.5	2.5	97.5
	75	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Figure 5

Mother Ed. Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	GED	2	5.0	5.0	5.0
	High School Graduation	17	42.5	42.5	47.5
	2 yr. college or technical college degree	6	15.0	15.0	62.5
	College Degree	7	17.5	17.5	80.0
	Graduate Degree	4	10.0	10.0	90.0
	Specialized Vocational Training	4	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Figure 6

Father Ed. Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than high school graduation	2	5.0	5.0	5.0
	High school graduation	21	52.5	52.5	57.5
	2 yr. college or technical college degree	3	7.5	7.5	65.0
	College Degree	7	17.5	17.5	82.5
	Graduate Degree	4	10.0	10.0	92.5
	Specialized Vocational Training	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	