The Effects of Family Structure and Parenting Style on Overt Aggressive Behavior at School

Bryce Summers & Linda Bakken

Department of Counseling, Educational & School Psychology, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas  67260

1. Introduction

Research indicates that elementary school children committing violent misbehavior are 11 times as likely not to live with their father and 6 times as likely to have parents who were not married [1]. Pfiffner, McBurnett, and Rathouz, [2] found a steady slope increase of violent behavior for youths starting with youths from two-parent families, increasing further for children who had some contact with their fathers, and finally increasing further for children with no contact with their father. Research such as this suggests that minimally that more parental supervision is associated with lower rate of adolescent deviance.

Another interest is how the parent approaches discipline and monitoring their youth in a household. Conducting extensive qualitative studies Baumrind [3] has identified four classification schemes for parenting style including authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. Research indicates that authoritative parenting has the highest associations with positive outcomes for children including decrease in disruptive behavior, increase academic success, and fostering social responsibility in children [4, 5]. Regarding the other parenting styles, research indicates that other parenting styles have a less overall positive effect compared to authoritative parenting, and this is especially true for neglectful parenting which has the highest negative impact [6, 7].

This author wanted to consider how the combination of these variables impact distinct ecological niches. Avenevoli, Sessa, and Steinberg [8] suggested from their findings that the combination of parenting style and family structure have different effects on children, and that certain family structures or parenting styles do not have an impact on children all the same. For example, Avenevoli [8] found that children from Asian, intact middle-class families who had authoritarian parenting styles had a positive relationship with GPA. The purpose of this study is to consider the combination of family structure (single-mother home versus two parent home) and parenting style (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful) in relation to aggression at school.

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

This study surveyed approximately four hundred high school seniors in three local area high schools. Two instruments were used in the study. One survey question students regarding ethnicity, family structure type, SES, and the incidents of aggressive behavior as evident by being sent to the principal’s office, or having in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. The second survey, derived by a renowned psychologist who took Baumrind’s previous qualitative work parenting styles, and converted it into quantifiable terms, measured parenting style. This survey measured parenting style by considering the level of monitoring by the parent(s) and the level of communication.

Results indicated that there is a significant difference between total number of disciplinary actions of adolescents and parenting style. There was also a significant difference between total number of disciplinary actions of adolescents and family structure. Adolescents from two parent households had less disciplinary actions than adolescents from other types of households. In addition, there was an significant difference between total number of disciplinary actions of adolescents and parenting style. That is, adolescents from authoritative parenting households had less disciplinary actions than adolescents other types of households.
References


