Impact of Parental Involvement Motives and Leisure Activities on Childhood Depression and Relationships with Parents

Kristin Herbert

Kristy Karthauser

California State University, Chico

Abstract

Previous research investigated effects of child depression and relations with parents; however, the aim of this study was to investigate if parent leisure activity and involvement motives affected child depressive symptoms and relationships with parents. Secondly, to determine if parent gender expressed different levels of involvement and leisure and whether the child’s gender showed different levels of depression or perceived relations with parents. Ninety-two families with school-aged children took surveys revealing their perceptions on parent involvement motives and leisure activities. Mothers and fathers differed on involvement but not leisure activities. Boys showed higher rates of depression than girls, but not relations with parents. Increased involvement and leisure activities with mothers were positively associated with child relations with parents and increased leisure was correlated with lower depression. Fathers’ involvement and leisure negatively affected depression. It’s important to increase involvement and leisure with children to decrease depression while promoting positive relations.

*Keywords:* child depression, parent-child relations, parental involvement motives, parental leisure activity

(149)Impact of Parental Involvement Motives and Leisure Activities on Childhood Depression and Relationships with Parents

The National Institute of Health stated “depressive disorders have affected approximately 11.2 percent of 13 to 18 year olds in the United States at some point during their lives” (2008). It is unclear how parental involvement and family leisure activities may affect children’s depression or their relationship with parents; therefore, this study was designed to examine whether parental involvement and family leisure activities affected the relationship a child has with his or her parent and child depression. Our second aim was to determine if child and parent gender had impact on involvement motives and whether boys or girls differed on depression and perception of relations with parents.

The impact of parent to child relationships on behavior, the changing status of relationships over time, and the effects of parent-child relations on the parent (Parent-Child Relationships, n.d.) had previously been examined. Parents who involve their child in leisure activities build stronger parent-child relationships, which can build autonomy and secure attachments, and assist in forming secure school based relationships which increase parental involvement and are important for children and parents. The effects of divorce, such as fighting, affects parent-child relationships more than family structure changes. Authoritative parenting increases less behavior problems and assist in achievement in schooling.

Parental involvement has been researched extensively and has been defined as parents who are actively involved with their child by participating in school based activities, providing parental support by doing home based activities with their child, advocating for their child, and communicating with teachers and children (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Based on this definition, schools and researchers are more able to communicate the ways parents are expected to be involved and are more capable of implementing programs suitable for parental involvement.

By becoming involved, a parent may form a better relationship with their children, which are typically associated with increased family leisure time (Zabriskie, & McCormick, 2003). Increased family leisure activities were a good indicator of family satisfaction because it was viewed that activities were a way to encourage feelings of unity, strengthened connections, and created a sense of belonging. Parents and children agreed that family leisure was the strongest predictor of their satisfaction with family life.

By increasing parental involvement, a child may form a strong relationship with a guardian, and to be able to form a secure attachment. A growth-promoting relationship is described as an individualized relationship that fosters physical, emotional, or behavioral health, which allows greater chance for positive well-being, cognitive capabilities, and social lives for children (Shonkoff, Boyce, Cameron, Duncan, Fox, & Nelson, 2009). By not requiring a working lifestyle for parents, and granting more freedom through government funded programs, parents are able to form stronger and more stable relationships that can physically increase brain capacity and construction for a child. Children may also receive growth-promoting relationships through child-care settings that require constant peer interaction and relationships with teachers, which are important for school readiness and higher learning.

Growth-promoting relationships are also relevant in adoptive families. The impact of children’s adoption status on their relationship with their parents and their ability to adjust socially and personally (Ternay, Wilborn, & Day, 1985) has been examined. Caucasian families containing only adopted children, only biological children, or a mix of biological and adopted children ranging from 4th-8th grade completed surveys regarding perceived relationships, and children self-reported their adjustments. Adopted children living with mixed families had higher adjustment scores than only adopted children; however, both of these groups didn’t show a difference in their perceived relationship with their parents; both showed great similarity to biological children.

If a child does not receive these positive connections with a guardian, he or she may form a disorganized attachment, which can cause aggression, lack of confidence, and/or an unrealistic outlook of their world (Borelli, David, Crowley, & Mayes, 2010). There is a strong link between disorganized attachment and psychological issues such as shyness, higher depressive rates, and anxiety. Secure attachments, and increased parental involvement may help decrease these potential psychological issues.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether family leisure activities and parental involvement affect child relations with parents, and childhood depression. The associations between child outcomes and parental involvement were statistically analyzed, as well as the difference between the mothers’ and fathers’ involvement. Although there has been research conducted on these topics, current studies have not specifically examined whether relationships with parents, and depression can change with the amount of parent-child involvement and family leisure activities. The effects of childhood depression are now more evident; therefore, it is important to discover the reasons why children become depressed and how parents can help avoid depression. We have hypothesized that mothers will report having greater involvement motives and leisure activities with her children than fathers. We also hypothesized that girls will report greater depression symptoms than boys, and have more positive relationships with her parents than boys.

**Method**

**Overview**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among parents’ involvement motives and leisure activities and children’s depression and relations with parents. A correlational design was chosen to examine these relationships among these naturally occurring variables. The predictor variables were parent motives and leisure activities. The outcome variables were child depression and relations with parents. Gender differences were also examined; the independent variables were parents’ gender and children’s gender. Mothers’ and fathers’ were compared on the dependent variables, which were involvement motives and leisure activities. Boys and girls were compared on the dependent variables depression, and relations with parents. The level of measurement for all variables was ordinal. All variables were measured quantitatively.

**Procedures**

This research was cleared through the Institutional Review Board and through written consent given by local parents and children. The research procedures were written and explained verbally by trained research assistants (RAs) to both parents and children in their home that included the allowance of any breaks needed, the ability to skip any questions, and the ability to end their participation at any time with no penalty. A child was allowed breaks or the ability to finish the questions on another day if there were signs of lethargy, and parents were given a break between the interview and written questionnaire. Parents responded to measures independently from the other partner. RAs had time to form a connection with the children before they performed a predetermined semi-structured interviewed that included oral and written responses including questions on how their parents parented, family relationships, self-concept, wellbeing, and family activities (Coyl-Shepherd, & Hanlon, 2014).

**Participants**

Due to time and financial constraints, nonprobability sampling was used. A total of 92 Californian families participated, which included 36 boys and 56 girls. Children were between the ages of 7-13 (M= 9.47), and family ethnicity consisted mainly of Anglo (approximately 60%) and Hispanic (20%). Fathers’ ages were 25-62 (M= 39.85), and mothers’ ages were 23-53 (M= 37.81). Many mothers completed some college (39.5%), but education level ranged from less than a high school education (9.3%), to graduate school (17.4%) and mothers worked from 0-80 hours a week (mean hours of 23.44); many fathers completed some college (29.2%) but ranged from less than a high school education (10.1%) to a graduate degree (12.4%) and worked from 0-80 hours per week (M= 38.96). Biological mothers had the highest relation with her child (94.5%) while adoptive and stepmothers had the lowest (1.1%); biological fathers had the highest relation to their child (78.3%) while adoptive and other parents had the lowest (2.2%).

**Materials**

The parent survey was used to measure *Parent Involvement Motives* (Newland, Chen, & Coyl-Shepherd, 2013). The measureincluded 6 items regarding motivations for spending time with their child. A sample item includes, “I feel close to my child.” This measure uses a Likert-type response scale. Anchors for the response scale were *0 (not at all), 1 (little), 2 (some), 3 (a lot), 4 (very much)*. Responses to each item were summed to provide a total involvement score for each parent (mothers’ alpha = .84; fathers’ alpha = .76). Higher scores represent greater parental involvement motives. The same data set was used for The *Leisure Activities Measure* (Cabrera, Shannon, Vogel, Tamis, LeMonda, Ryan, & Brooks Gunn, 2004). The measure included 15 items regarding how many times per week parents had a chance to do activities with their school-age child. A sample item included, “reading together”. This measure uses a Likert-type response scale. Anchors for the response scale were 1-5, *1 (rarely)* and 5 *(4 or more times per week)*. Responses to each item were summed to provide a total leisure score for each parent (mothers’ alpha = .83; fathers’ alpha = .84). All measures were measured quantitatively.

The instrument *The Behavioral Assessment for Children* was used to measure child depression. The measureincluded 13 items with a combination of true or false questions and a Likert type scale. A sample item includes “Nothing goes my way” (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Anchors for the response scale were *(never, sometimes, often, and almost always)*. Responses to each item were summed to provide a total depression score for boys and girls (childrens’ alpha = .81). The instrument *The Behavioral Assessment* for Children was also used to measure Child Relations with Parents. A sample item includes “My parents trust me”, (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). This measure uses a Likert-type response scale. Anchors for the response scale were 1-4 *(never, sometimes, often, and almost always*). Responses to each item were summed to provide a total leisure score for each parent (children’s alpha = .82) higher scores represent higher levels of positive child relations with their parents.

**Results**

The purpose of this study was to test gender difference between parent’s involvement motives, and parental leisure activity and between boys and girls depression and the children’s relations with parents. A paired t-test was used to determine the effects of the parent gender on parental variable while independent sample t-tests were used to determine the effects on child gender on child outcomes. Fathers’ involvement motives score was M=16.82, SD=4.18; mothers’ involvement motives score was M=18.13, SD=4.96. Fathers’ leisure activities score was M=38.05, SD=10.51; mothers’ leisure activities score was M= 39, SD= 10.07. Children’s depression score for girls’ was M=45.12, SD=7.88; boys’ depression score was M=48.54, SD=7.88. Children’s relation to parents score for girls’ was M=51.35, SD=9.14; boys’ relation to parents score was M=49.97, SD=9.14 (see Table 1).

The paired samples t-test showed a significant mean difference between mothers’ and fathers’ involvement motives, t(88) = -1.89 , p < .05; however, the paired sample t-tests failed to show a significant mean difference between mothers’ and fathers’ leisure activities, t(67) = .62 , p > .05. The t-test for independent samples showed a significant mean difference between boys’ and girl’s depression, t(83) = 2.01, p<.05; however, the t-test for independent samples did not show a significant difference between boys’ and girls’ relations with parents, t(86) = -.69 , p > .05 (see Table 1).

The second study purpose was to determine the associations between parent and child variables. There was a weak negative relationship betweenfathers’ involvement motives and child depression, r(82) = -.29, p < 0.01. There was a weak, negative relationship between fathers’ leisure activities and child depression, r(73) = -.21 , p < .05. There was a weak, negative relationship between mothers’ leisure activities and child depression, r(69) = -.27 , p <.05. There was a moderate, positive relationship between mothers’ involvement motives and child relations, r(84) = .46 , p <.01, and mothers’ leisure activities and child relations was a weak, positive relationship r(72)=.28,p<.01 (see Table 2).

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among parents’ involvement motives and leisure activities and children’s depression and relations with parents. The results of the t-test for parental involvement motives showed a higher mean score formothers’ compared with fathers’. The results of the t-test for parent leisure indicated no differencesbetween mothers’ and fathers’ leisure activities. We hypothesized that girls would report higher depression than boys, however, the results of the t-test for child depression indicated that boys had a higher mean score for depression than girls. The results of the t-test for children’s relation with parents indicated no difference between boys’ and girls’ relations with parents.

The association between fathers’ involvement motives and child depression were weak and negative, indicating that as involvement increases children’s depression decreases. The association between fathers’ leisure activities and child depression were weak and negative, indicating that as leisure activities increase child depression decreases. The association between mothers’ leisure activities and child depression were weak and negative indicating that as leisure activities increase children depression decreases. The correlation between mothers’ involvement motives and child relations were moderate and positive, indicating that as involvement increased, so does child relations. The correlation between mothers’ leisure activities and child relations was weak and positive indicating that as leisure activities increase so do child relations.

Similar to findings reported by (Parent-Child Relationships, n.d.), we found parents who involve their child in leisure activities build stronger parent-child relationships. We also found that by becoming involved, a parent may form a better relationship with their children which are typically associated with increased family leisure time (Zabriskie, & McCormick, 2003).

Strengths of our study included; the study participants were mothers and fathers and previous studies have examined mothers and fathers separately. The study was both correlational and quasi-experimental previous studies have used one method. Limitations to the study included; the sample was not ethnically diverse our study included primarily Anglo families we should make our study more diverse to include diversity. We suggest to make a larger sample size to establish higher statistical significant and reliability.

The results suggest that parents’ who are involved with their child will have better relations with their child and their child will show fewer signs of depression. It is important for parents of school age children to know this information so that they can recognize the importance of parental involvement and its affects on aspects such as child depression, and relations with parents.

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*Appendix*

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics, Alphas, and t tests for Parent Involvement and Leisure activities and child depression and child relations with parents.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | α | M | Mdn | Mode | SD | t | Sig. |
| Fathers’ Involvement Motives | 0.76 | 16.92 | 17.0 | 15.0 | 4.18 | -1.89\* | .03 |
| Mothers’ Involvement Motives | 0.84 | 18.13 | 19.0 | 24.0 | 4.96 |  |  |
| Father Leisure Activities | 0.84 | 37.82 | 37.5 | 36.0 | 10.51 | -.62 | .27 |
| Mother Leisure Activities | 0.83 | 38.81 | 37.0 | 36.0 | 10.07 |  |  |
| Boys Depression | 0.81 | 48.54 | 45.0 | 43.0 | 7.88 | 2.01\* | .02 |
| Girls Depression | 0.81 | 45.12 | 45.0 | 43.0 | 7.88 |  |  |
| Boys relations with parents | 0.82 | 49.97 | 52.0 | 62.0 | 9.14 | -.69 | .25 |
| Girls relations with parents | 0.82 | 51.35 | 52.0 | 62.0 | 9.14 |  |  |

*Note.* Child Boys N=36, Child Girls N=56, Mothers N=92, Fathers N=92

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

Table 2

*Correlations between Alphas, and t tests for Parent Involvement and Leisure activities and child depression and child relations with parents.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | Child Depression | Child Relations with Parents |
| Fathers Involvement Motives | -.29\*\* | .09 |
| Mother Involvement Motives | -.15 | .46\*\* |
| Father Leisure Activities | -.21\* | .07 |
| Mother Leisure Activities | -.27\* | .28\*\* |

*Note.* \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01