The Effect of Parenting Education on Parent and Child Behaviors: The Moderating Roles of Income and Ethnicity
Jennifer K. Finders, G. John Geldhof, Michaella Sektnan, & Denise Rennekamp

Abstract

- We investigated the effect of participating in an evidence-based parenting education series on parent’s and children’s skills and behaviors, and whether income and ethnicity moderated this relation.
- Results indicated that all parents reported significant improvements in their parenting skills and their children’s behaviors after completing a parenting education series.
- Latino parents reported significantly greater improvements compared to Caucasian parents.
- Parenting education had a weaker effect on low-income parents’ ratings of their children’s behaviors.

Introduction

- Parenting education is a promising resource for supporting parents and promoting the well-being of children (e.g., Seltzik & Dumas, 1996; Winter et al., 2012).
- Although there has been an accumulation of evidence supporting parenting interventions that target ethnically diverse populations (Dumas et al., 2011; Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001), it is unclear whether evidence-based programs designed for use with Caucasian parents are effective in ethnically diverse families.
- Most parenting education programs that were designed to target Caucasian families do not generalize to minority populations without the appropriate cultural adaptations (Gross et al., 2007; O’Connor et al., 2007)
- Understanding the impact of parenting education on Latino families is especially important because:
  - The Latino subpopulation is the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States (U.S. Census, 2012)
  - Ethnic minority groups are disproportionately represented among those living in poverty and experiencing co-morbidities associated with being low-income (Corcoran & Adams, 1997; Duncan et al., 1994).
  - Evidence suggests that low-income parents benefit less from parenting interventions (Dumas & Wahler, 1983; Lutjens et al., 2006; Reyno & McGrath, 2006; Wahler, 1980; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1990).

- The present study therefore explored two objectives: 1. to replicate the finding that parenting education has a positive impact on all families, and 2. to explore whether parenting education has greater or weaker effects among low-income and minority families.

Hypotheses

- Participation in a parenting education series will lead to positive changes in parenting skills and child behaviors.
- Low-income and ethnic minority families will experience the greatest benefits from completing parenting education.

Methods

- Sample consisted of 2,389 Latino and Caucasian parents who participated in evidence-based parent education series in the Pacific Northwest between 2010 and 2012 (Table 1).
- All data came from the Parenting Skills Ladder (PSL), a self-report inventory that asks parents to rate their behaviors and skills, as well as their children’s behaviors and skills, before and after completing a parenting education series (Dolenc-Nott et al., 2015).
- A retrospective pre/post design was chosen to maximize the measure’s validity (Fruit et al., 2010).
- Parenting skills were measured using 12 items rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 0 = Low to 6 = High.
- Child behaviors were measured using three items rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 0 = Low to 6 = High.

Analysis

- A multilevel regression model (parent self-report scores nested within parents, parents nested in parenting education series) was run in Mplus.
- ICC’s > .10 at individual and class levels
- Non-significant predictors were trimmed in the final model

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables of Interest (n = 2,389 parents, n = 235 parenting education classes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Age</td>
<td>32.70</td>
<td>9.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Income</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent PSL Score Before</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent PSL Score After</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child PSL Score Before</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child PSL Score After</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: PSL = Parenting Skills Ladder Sum Score

Table 2. Multi-Level Model Predicting Perceived Change in Child Behaviors after Participating in Parenting Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>b (SE)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Within Parent-Level Main Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>1.31*** (0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Parent-Level Effects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time X Ethnicity</td>
<td>0.21* (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Between Class-Level Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time X Ethnicity</td>
<td>0.34*** (0.07)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Outcomes controlled for mandated status

Results

- The main effect of parenting education was significant for parent skills (b = 1.38; SE = 0.51; p < .001).
- The effect of parenting education on child behaviors was moderated by ethnicity (Figure 1).
  - Caucasian parents reported an average gain of 1.31 points.
  - Latino parents reported a significantly greater average gain of 1.52 points.
- The effect of parenting education on child behaviors was also moderated by ethnicity at the between-class level.
  - For every 10% of a class’s enrollees that were Latino, parents in that class reported an added increase in their child’s skills of .034 (see Table 2).
- The average effect of time on children’s behaviors was not moderated by low-income status at the between-parent level.
- At the between-class level, parents who attended classes with more low-income enrollees reported weaker gains in their child’s skills.

Discussion

- Parenting education can provide parents with tools to improve their parenting skills and may serve as a positive mechanism to address the needs of vulnerable families.
- These results suggest that universal parenting skills and behaviors are important within diverse family contexts, including ethnic minority families (Hill et al., 2003; Mistry et al., 2002; Steinberg et al., 1994).
- From this perspective, it is possible that parenting education provides a social resource that promotes resiliency in children from vulnerable backgrounds.
- Low-income families may have better outcomes if they receive targeted support, such as enhancements to parent training that address the chronic stresses that accompany low-SES (Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang, & Glassman, 2000; Reyno & McGrath, 2006).

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