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Exploring the relationship between parental self-efficacy and social support systems

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Exploring the relationship between parental self-efficacy and social support systems

by

Samantha Leigh Young

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Human Development and Family Studies

Major Professor: Kimberly Greder
Kere Hughes-Belding
Gayle Luze

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2011
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3. METHOD</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX: Institutional Review Board Approval</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES CITED</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Parenting children stands as one of the most influential activities one can attempt (Ardelt and Eccles, 2001). Raising a child to adulthood and equipping that child with the necessary skills to enter successfully into society requires dedication as well as knowledge (Spoth & Conroy, 1993). To further understand the factors that shape mothers’ parenting behavior, self-efficacy in parenting knowledge and skills, as well as perception of a personal social support system will be examined. This study features Caucasian and Hispanic mothers who live in rural communities across 17 states and who have low-incomes and young children. This study examines the relationship between parental self-efficacy and social support to better understand the influences on parenting.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

To understand how mothers shape their children’s lives it is useful to understand mothers’ beliefs and perceptions about their ability to parent and their perceptions of their social support system (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001). To further understand the factors that shape mothers’ parenting behavior, self-efficacy in parenting knowledge and skills, as well as perception of a personal social support system will be examined.

Parenting children stands as one of the most influential activities one can attempt (Ardelt and Eccles, 2001). Raising a child to adulthood and equipping that child with the necessary skills to enter successfully into society requires dedication as well as knowledge (Spoth & Conroy, 1993). Parents experience struggle, uncertainty, and even fear. Social support has been shown to be a protective factor against stressors for both parent and child (Cochran, 1993; Sheldon, 2002). Understanding how parents perceive their social support system as well as how they perceive their ability to parent can greatly aid professionals who design and/or deliver programs targeting parents. This study hopes to further research concerning parents’ social support systems in addition to their perceptions of their ability to parent successfully.

In this paper, the relationship between parental self-efficacy, a parent’s view of themselves as a parent, and social support, the support received from those closest to an individual, among rural, low-income mothers with young children (0-12 years of age) will be examined. This study features rural, low-income mothers who have young children across 17 states and racial/ethnic groups. This study examines the relationship between parental self-efficacy and social support to hopefully better understand the influences on parenting. The present study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) Is there a
relationship between parental self-efficacy and social support among mothers? 2) Does the level of self-efficacy differ between Caucasian mothers and Hispanic mothers? 3) Does the level of social support differ between Caucasian mothers and Hispanic mothers?
Defining Parental Self-efficacy

Several different terms are associated with the concept of parental self-efficacy. The meaning of parental self-efficacy has been associated with self-confidence, parental-efficacy, or mastery. It is understood that these terms are commonly used interchangeably. For the purpose of this study, however, the term parental self-efficacy will be used.

Parental self-efficacy, similar to many constructs in the social science field, can be difficult to explain through a single definition. The intricacy of parental self-efficacy is shown through the multifaceted definitions that have been utilized in the social service researchers and field workers. Teti and Gelfand (1991) defined parental self-efficacy as “the degree to which parents perceive themselves as capable and effective in the parenting role.” This first viewpoint focuses on the parenting role and was used by Ontai and Sano (2008) regarding parental self-efficacy and social support among rural low income mothers.

Coleman and Karraker (2003) took a slightly different approach when defining parental self-efficacy and emphasized confidence in parenting skills. While Teti and Gelfand (2008) focused on the parenting role, Coleman and Karraker (2003) chose to narrow in on a parent’s ability. In this definition, parenting tasks were viewed as any task related to parenting a child. Although Coleman and Karraker’s definition highlighted a parent’s ability, self-efficacy is not entirely explained or expanded upon. It would be helpful to readers and those engaging in future research to have a clearer picture of what confidence refers to and how it is displayed. Teti and Gelfand’s definition of parental self-efficacy will be used in this study. Parental self-efficacy has been measured in a variety of
ways. Table 1 provides an overview of three ways of measuring this construct (Jones & Prinz, 2005).

Table 1. Overview of Parental Self-Efficacy Measurements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Measurement</th>
<th>Description of Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Parental Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Broad extent of confidence, general focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Related Parental Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Specific childcare tasks (e.g., caring for a sick child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow-Domain Parental Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Focus is on one parenting domain (e.g., discipline)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purposes of the current study, General Parental Self-Efficacy will be the mode of measurement.

**Understanding the Importance of Parental Self-efficacy**

Parents’ perceptions in their abilities to effectively and successfully parent directly affects how they parent (Coleman and Karraker, 1998). A model created by Ardelt and Eccles (2001) aides those trying to understand the impact of parental self-efficacy on parenting and children with more depth. Ardelt and Eccles’ (2001) model suggested that parental self-efficacy can produce a direct influence on a child’s success through the modeling of attitudes and beliefs.
Jones and Prinz found this model to be correct as they applied it to their research shortly after (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001). The premise of the model is that as a parent’s level of parental self-efficacy increases, he/she is more likely to exhibit positive attitudes, outlooks, and beliefs. This may result in his/her children adopting these attitudes and beliefs and applying them to their own behavior and mental schemas which leads to a higher level of child success (2001). Bandura’s theory of observational learning (Bandura, 1982) shared this emphasis on modeling when it suggests that children observe and adopt what their parent’s model.

Raikes and Thompson (2005) found that parental self-efficacy appears to be a noteworthy indication of the level parenting quality. If it is possible to understand the signs of quality parenting, then the options for support to parents prior to problem identification open up considerably. Other researchers have reported this link to quality parenting as well (Ontai & Sano, 2008).

It has been determined that parental self-efficacy is a precursor to parenting outcomes. Coleman and Karraker (1998) as well as Jones and Prinz (2005) reported that parental self-efficacy is an important predictor in a parent’s positive behaviors while parenting. This clear and specific link provides an inside look at how parents can be supported through intervention.

On a more long-term level, researchers report that parenting practices or applications can be affected by parental self-efficacy levels (Coleman and Karraker, 1998). As a component of a parent’s way of parenting, parental self-efficacy influences their ability to perform productive parenting structures or guidelines with their children (Ontai &
Sano, 2008). For parents to enact positive practices in the home, a higher level of parental self-efficacy is needed (1998).

Many researchers present associations between general measures of parental self-efficacy and a lower economic status (Ontai & Sano, 2008; Aneshensel, 1992; Turner & Lloyd, 1999). This important association strongly encourages social science researchers to acknowledge the long-reaching impact of parental self-efficacy and questions whether the way a parent perceives their ability to effectively parent has impact farther than previously believed.

**Grasping the Implications of Low Parental Self-efficacy**

When a parent shows a low level of parental self-efficacy, many areas of life are affected (Coleman and Karraker, 1998). It is not only the parent’s life that is impacted, but their child’s as well (Ontai & Sano, 2008). It is important to identify the impacts of low parental self-efficacy in order to adequately understand the need for research and program evaluation in this aspect of social science.

Additionally, parents with low parental self-efficacy are more likely to become overwhelmed when facing multiple stressors. As a result of this emotional overload, they are more apt to give up on engaging in positive actions (McCurdy & Jones, 2000; Ardelt & Eccles, 2001). As parents demonstrate this lack of interest, children tend to adopt this behavior, too, according to Bandura’s theory of observational learning (Bandura, 1982).

Maternal depression is shown to be a result of low parental self-efficacy in parenting (Cutrona & Troutman, 1986; Teti & Gelfand, 1991). Depression can be another stressor that can negatively impact the mother’s relationship with her child. Unfortunately, a poor mother-child relationship may carry over into other areas of a child’s development.
Lower parental self-efficacy has been linked to children having actual behavioral issues (Gibaud-Wallson & Waudersman, 1987, cited in Johnston & Mash, 1989).

Though depression can add numerous difficulties to the home, parental self-efficacy can also impact one’s parenting role. Parents with lower self-efficacy in the ability to effectively and successfully parent are more likely to adopt a passive coping method while in the role of parent (Wells-Parker, Miller, & Topping, 1990). Again, Bandura’s theory of observational learning cautioned that children of parents who have a passive coping style are likely to model their own coping mechanisms after what they observe (Bandura, 1982).

Not only is parental self-efficacy linked to stress, depression, and passive coping, it is also critically linked to the mental processes involved in parenting. Grusec, Hastings, and Mammone (1994) suggested that parents with low self-efficacy have difficulty putting their knowledge to use and do not persevere in their parenting role. Parental self-efficacy has been shown linked to many behaviors, nearly all having a strong influence on the quality of the relationship between parent and child.

Bandura, Reese, & Adams (1982) conceptualized parental self-efficacy and provide a deeper understanding of the mental capacity of a person who possesses lower levels of parental success. This research team concluded that individuals with decreased self-efficacy are likely to give up easily when stressors are presented. These individuals tend to internalize failure, exhibit anxious behaviors as well as depression, and are more likely to feel less satisfied in their roles (1982). Extending this knowledge to the parenting sphere, Bandura stated that a parent who demonstrates a satisfactory level of self-efficacy should exhibit interest in parenting and commitment to the role (Bandura, 1993). Consequently, interest and commitment to parenting is likely to result in positive parenting behaviors and
child outcomes. As the parent exhibits a positive level of self-efficacy, the child has the opportunity to observe and adopt the parent’s practices, aligning with Bandura’s theory of observational learning (Bandura, 1982).

Understanding individual beliefs is valuable to grasping the impact of parental self-efficacy on children. However, it is helpful to examine the influences on parental self-efficacy to comprehend parenting further. The following sections aim to explore one such influence: social support. As Sheldon (2002) stated, research suggests the benefit of examining both personal attitudes as well as social support systems when trying to understand persuasions in parenting.

**Defining Social Support**

The support parents receive can be titled as social support or personal support. Though interchangeable, social support will be the term utilized within this study. Social support is another concept that may be difficult to define. According to Hinde and Stevenson-Hinde (1988), a relationship is continually changing and diverse among individuals.

Cochran (1993) defined a social support system as those people directly associated with an individual. Those people can include relatives, neighbors, co-workers, and friends with whom the individual interacts. Eggebeen and Hogan (1990) suggested that kin, particularly the parents, are an extremely important source of support for single parents. The forms in which social support can present itself may vary greatly.

Size of a social support system may play a role in the quality of parenting, as implied by Jennings, Stagg, and Connors (1991). This research group discovered that mothers were more likely to praise their children and were less controlling when the
maternal support system was larger (1991). Additionally, there can be multiple factors that may affect a person’s social support. First, Cochran (1993) emphasized that personality characteristics influence the nature of a person’s system. Furthermore, personality traits are wired in at birth (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1988). An individual’s personality characteristics may affect the size, quality, commitment, and diversity of a social system (1988). These influences may impact the support systems of the participants in the present study.

The types and characteristics of interactions between individuals may play a factor in the forming of social systems. Hinde and Stevenson-Hinde (1998) indicated that the nature of an interaction relies on the type of relationship that encompasses the interaction. Expectations and feelings of the individual have an influence over subsequent behaviors and interactions toward and with others (1998). This research team supplied a list of categories and questions that assists in comprehending how interactions impact social support systems: content (participating in activities together), diversity (types of activities), intimacy (sharing life events), and commitment (dedicated to each other) (Hinde and Stevenson-Hinde, 1998).

**Research Examining Social Support**

When parents are receiving parenting support, their children’s social and emotional development is enhanced as the parents interact with their children in positive ways that promote development (Trivette & Dunst, 2005). Through this, it is understood that knowledge and skills are learned and strengthened from quality social support networks. Parents are able to aid their children’s development to a greater degree through positive
social networks as children are exposed to the influences their parent’s support systems have on the home environment (Trivette & Dunst, 2005).

A reoccurring part of parenting involves managing everyday stressors that disrupt daily routines and schedules. Studies have found that when stress is present parental self-efficacy is undermined or weakened (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Ontai & Sano, 2008). Everyday stressors may include daily hassles that are related to parenting. Crnic and Greenberg (1990) suggest that these hassles are more helpful in predicting wellness of parents than uncommon major events. With a decreased support system, parents may find themselves lowering their evaluation of the quality of their parenting when few sources of support are available to them (Cutrona, 1984). Parents may feel that they are on their own without anyone to lend a hand or share responsibility (1984).

The following list gives examples of everyday stressors that may interfere with parental self-efficacy (Cutrona, 1984):

- Reserving daily childcare (e.g., during work hours)
- Unexpected need for childcare (e.g., sick child, care during appointments)
- Transportation (e.g., vehicle needs maintenance)
- Higher education (e.g., need for childcare during classes)

Understanding the interaction between social support systems and parental self-efficacy will aid social service practitioners in guiding and aiding parents dealing with these and other stressors.

**The Association between Social Support and Parental Self-efficacy**

Although many researchers have examined parental self-efficacy and social support as separate concepts, there have not been a large number of studies investigating the
influence these two constructs have on each other. Nonetheless, several articles have reported a statistical correlation between the two, as demonstrated in the following paragraph. Other research has shown that social support and parental self-efficacy can serve as mediators to each other (Raikes and Thompson, 2005).

Crnic and Greenberg demonstrated that social support is indeed associated with parental self-efficacy (1990). Other researchers reported this relation between the two as well (Izzo, Weiss, Shanahan & Rodriguez-Brown, 2000; Ontai & Sano, 2008). Furthermore, Ontai and Sano (2008) found that parental self-efficacy and social support were positively correlated. This indicates that higher levels of parental self-efficacy are related to higher levels of parental social support (Ontai & Sano, 2008). Building upon the previous research, the present study aims to understand differences in culture that may impact the influence social support systems have on parental self-efficacy. The present study also will examine Caucasian and Hispanic mothers’ parental self-efficacy and social support levels.

Raikes and Thompson (2005) provided a reminder that parental self-efficacy is a noteworthy precursor to parenting value and quality. This research team explained that when the social support system is sparse, the parent’s self-efficacy in their ability to effectively and successfully parent decreases (2005). Teti and Gelfand (1991) reported that parental self-efficacy serves as a mediator to several traditionally noted correlates of quality parenting, particularly social support. Therefore, parental self-efficacy aids in maintaining positive levels of social support.

Cutrona (1984) discovered that parental self-efficacy could be protected from the negative effects of life stressors by a strong social support system. Raikes and Thompson
(2005) also reported this finding. Consequently, social support acts as a mediator for parental self-efficacy. Reinforcing this, Gardner and Cutrona (2004) found that a parent’s perception of their social support can be used as a decisive instrument in offsetting detrimental outcomes due to life stressors on parental self-efficacy, as well as other aspects of parenting.

**Rural Living and Social Support Systems**

Parents living in rural areas may face more challenges to expanding and maintaining their social support systems than parents residing in urban communities. Ontai and Sano (2008) supplied a closer look through reporting research on parenting and rural living conducted by Gardner and Cutrona (2004) when they suggested that because of a lack of transportation as well as geographic isolation limit a social support system. These factors then lead to increased stress levels and compromised parenting (2004).

The majority of single mothers receive support from social networks; however, for mothers residing in rural areas, their support systems may be more difficult to access due to distance (Ontai & Sano, 2008). The size of their social networks may be more difficult to maintain due to lower population sizes and densities in the rural areas compared to single mothers living in an urban community (2008). This is an important part of the social support system to consider as Jennings, Stagg, and Connors (1991) reported that the size of a maternal support system influences the mother’s parenting behaviors.

**Caucasian Families and Social Support**

As Caucasian mothers’ social support and self-efficacy were examined in the present, research conducted around this race is valuable. Previous research has shown autonomy or individualistic to be a strong characteristic present in Caucasian families
(Glazer, 2006). Independent decision-making is emphasized in this autonomous nature along with goals and creativity (2006). Glazer (2006) also explains that Caucasian individuals valuing this autonomy are basing their interactions with family on relationships that are contractual or need-based.

While investigating life satisfaction across cultures, Suh, Diener, Oishi, and Triandis (1998) found individualistic peoples to have emotions as a significant predictor of their life satisfaction. Furthermore, self-esteem was linked to predict life satisfaction in individualistic people groups (Diener & Diener, 1995). Kagitcibasi (1994) compared collectivist or interdependence social groups to more individualistic cultures when he suggests that separate boundaries are present in individualistic cultures but not in collectivist groups. This understanding of cultural differences is valuable when examining social support among Caucasian and Hispanic mothers. Though Caucasians have been shown to learn towards individualism and separateness, research has shown that Hispanic mothers are likely to value embedded relationships or interdependence (Kagitcibasi, 1994).

**The Social Support Emphasis in the Hispanic Culture**

An important topic to consider in the present study is the role of social support in Hispanic families. With the data backing this study focused on Hispanic mothers, the cultural background must be taken into account. Types of social support with examples will be examined in the following paragraphs as well as the effect immigration may have on social support systems. Finally, the influence of social support on parental self-efficacy will be looked at through a Hispanic lens.

Arnett (1995) enlightened readers with the concept that parents follow their cultural role expectations of parents. This shows that parenting practices and values are learned and
adopted; again reinforcing Bandura’s (1982) observational learning theory. Parents falling outside of their culture’s parental role expectations may encounter added stress and lower parental self-efficacy levels (Arnett, 1995). In 1985, Vega and Kolody found that Hispanics were more likely than non-Hispanics to depend on family members rather than friends. They were also more likely to keep in consistent interaction with family members in a system based on reciprocation (1985).

Forehand and Kotchick (1996) explained that Hispanics hold a strong sense of familialism, which refers to being rooted in the family or family loyalty. It has been reported that there is a heavy dependence on extended family and other social support systems in the Hispanic culture (1996). They also found that interpersonal relatedness and respect are aspects of family life that are of high significance within Hispanic households (1996). Additionally, individual achievement has been downplayed in Hispanic homes while close family relations have been emphasized. Dilworth-Anderson and Marshall (1996) suggested that Hispanic families are likely to live in close proximity and are more likely to maintain their native customs and language than other ethnicities.

Some common types of support in Hispanic social systems reflect a deep reliance on extended family. The responsibility of raising a child is often shared by family members, including parents, grandparents, siblings, other family, and friends (Forehand & Kotchick, 1996). This familialism may serve as a form of self-identity and self-worth (DeGarmo and Martinez, 2006). Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) explained that familialism can encompass certain characteristics that bind social relationships. These characteristics can come in the form of structural, behavioral, and attitudinal (1994).
However, immigration to a new land may interfere with this strong social support system. Finch and Vega (2003) indicated that immigration leads to a decline in the health of immigrants, placing a strain on relationships. Also, a longer acculturation period may occur when social support systems are interrupted. (2003). It has been found that Hispanic mothers with strong support systems are more likely to respond positively to parental training (Forehand & Kotchick, 1996). With more parental training, self-efficacy in parenting will increase (1996). Training, satisfaction, and effective coping can also emerge from time spent with other knowledgeable mothers, as shown through Rhodes, Contreras, & Mangelsdorf (1994) study into the benefits of mentors on mental capacity.

The Current Study

The presence of social support systems may have a deep influence on parental behaviors and attitudes, particularly parental self-efficacy. The present research study will examine Caucasian and Hispanic mothers and the perceptions they hold about their levels of parental self-efficacy and social support systems. The following visual demonstrates this expectation.

Figure 1. *The Relationship between Parental Self-Efficacy, Social Support and Parent*
This research will expand on research by Ontai and Sano (2008), who found that parental self-efficacy and social support were positively correlated. The present study will attempt to build upon these findings by observing if there is a difference in the relationship between these variables when comparing Caucasian and Hispanic mothers.

Past literature has shown that a relationship between parental self-efficacy and social support exists (Crnic and Greenberg, 1990). However, there is a gap in the literature when looking across ethnic groups. What is unclear, and what this study hopes to discover, is whether there is a difference between Caucasian mothers and Hispanic mothers in their levels of self-efficacy and social support.

Research Questions

This study will seek to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between parental self-efficacy and social support among mothers?
   
   Hypothesis 1: Social support and parental self-efficacy among mothers will be significantly and positively correlated.

2. Does the level of self-efficacy differ between Caucasian mothers and Hispanic mothers?
   
   Hypothesis 2: Hispanic mothers will have a higher level of self-efficacy than Caucasian mothers.

3. Does the level of social support differ between Caucasian mothers and Hispanic mothers?
   
   Hypothesis 3: Hispanic mothers will have a higher level of social support than Caucasian mothers.
CHAPTER 3. METHOD

The sample used in the present study was a part of a larger, longitudinal study named *Rural Families Speak (RFS)*, which sought to examine the policy effects of welfare reforms on the lives of rural, low-income mothers with children 0-12 years of age (Bauer, 2004). Rural was conceptualized as counties with populations above 2,500 and fewer than 19,000. RFS included three points of data collection (i.e., Waves 1, 2, 3) and included 522 participants in 17 states (i.e., CA, IA, LA, MA, MD, MI, MN, NE, NH, NY, OH, OR, SD, WY, KY, WV). For more information about the *Rural Families Speak* project see Bauer (2004).

Participants

Participants were mothers 18 years and older with at least one child in the home that was 12 years old or younger. Additionally, household incomes needed to fall below 200% of the poverty threshold, with the option for participation in welfare programs (including Food Stamps, WIC, and Head Start) available in order to examine effects of welfare reforms. Mothers were recruited through agencies that provided human services to eligible families (e.g., Department of Human Services, food pantries, Latino Migrant and Settled Workers Program, Women Infants and Children Program, Head Start).

Each state was asked to interview 30 families annually over a 3-year period, called a wave. As new states were added to the study, each group of states was called a panel. Panel 1 started in 2002 and continued through 2003 and 2004. Panel 2 spanned 2003, 2004, and 2005. Finally, Panel 3 (which included Iowa) covered 2004, 2005, and 2006. The present study was limited to data from Wave 1, but included all three panels.
From Wave 1, panel 1, 2, and 3, mothers were an average of 29 years 3 months old. The youngest child in the home was an average of 3 years 3 months old. Sixty-one percent (N=320) of mothers sampled were non-Hispanic White (Caucasian), while Hispanic women represented 22.8% (N=119) of the respondents. It is important to note that Hispanic mothers were indeed over-represented when compared to the U.S. population where they make up 14% of the families in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

When asked about formal schooling, 32.9% of the mothers stated they had not earned a high school diploma or GED. However, 39% did report having attained additional formal education beyond a high school diploma or G.E.D (i.e., vocational training, college/university coursework or degree, graduate coursework). Educational levels were coded from 1.00 (“8th grade or less”) to 8.00 (“graduate degree”). See Table 2 for additional demographics.

Table 2. Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at Interview</td>
<td>29 yrs 3 mo</td>
<td>18 yr 0 mo – 36 yrs 11 mo</td>
<td>7.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Household Income</td>
<td>$15,379</td>
<td>$0.00-$44,758</td>
<td>$9,637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of People in Household</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>2.00-9.00</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Poverty (Must be below 200% of Poverty Threshold)</td>
<td>82.29%</td>
<td>0.00%-195.88%</td>
<td>46.55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measures

**Parental self-efficacy.** The Parenting Ladder (Richards, 1998) was used to determine the mothers’ parental self-efficacy. A self-report survey, the Parenting Ladder (Richards, 1998) is separated into two parts, the first measuring mother’s perceptions about their ability to effectively and successfully parent; self-efficacy. The second section focused on the mothers’ rating of her social support system.

Mothers were asked to respond using a 7-point Likert scale (continuum of 0 = *not at all* to 6 = *all the time*) to a series of seven questions included in the Parenting Ladder that all pertained to parental self-efficacy. The scores for each question were summed for a maximum total score of 42. Sum scores were interpreted as the higher the score received, the higher the level of parental self-efficacy. As an example, one question asked parents where they would put their understanding of how their child develops along the parenting ladder (Richards, 1998). A Cronbach’s alpha of .7012 (N= 320) was found on the self-efficacy scale.

**Parental social support.** The Parenting Ladder (Richards, 1998) was also used to partially measure the mothers’ perceived social support. Mothers were asked to respond using a 7-point Likert scale (continuum of 0 = *not at all* to 6 = *all the time*) to a series of six questions included that pertained to social support. The scores for each question were summed for a maximum total score of 36. Sum scores were interpreted as the higher the score, the higher level of perceived social support. As an example, one question asked parents where they would put themselves on the parenting ladder in regards to having others to talk with (Richards, 1998). The social support scale demonstrated a Cronbach’s alpha of .8574 (N= 119).
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Self-Efficacy and Social Support Sum Scores

Table 3 below includes the parental self-efficacy and perceived social support scores for mothers who identified themselves as Caucasian, as well as for mothers who identified themselves as Hispanic.

Table 3. Parent Self-efficacy Scores and Social Support Scores of Caucasian and Hispanic Mothers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Scores of Parental Self-Efficacy (Maximum Score = 42)</th>
<th>Total Scores of Parental Social Support (Maximum Score = 36)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>30.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>32.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1: Is there a relationship between parental self-efficacy and social support among mothers? Hypothesis 1: Social support and parental self-efficacy among mothers are significantly and positively correlated.

Pearson correlation coefficients indicated that there was a positive and significant correlation between parental self-efficacy and social support, with the $p$ value falling far
below .05. Hypothesis 1 was proved as a correlation between social support and parental self-efficacy was found. See Table 4.

Table 4. *Correlation between Parental Self-efficacy and Parental Social Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Scores of Social Support</th>
<th>Total Scores of Self-Efficacy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.450</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>473</td>
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<td>468</td>
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<th>Total Scores of Parental Self-Efficacy</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Pearson Corr.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>.451</td>
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**Research Question 2: Does the level of self-efficacy differ between Caucasian mothers and Hispanic mothers?**

_Hypothesis 2: Hispanic mothers have a higher level of self-efficacy than Caucasian mothers._

An independent samples T-test was performed to compare parental self-efficacy between Caucasian mothers and Hispanic mothers. There was a significant difference between the scores of Caucasian mothers \( (M=30.66, SD=4.65) \) and Hispanic mothers \( (M=32.41, SD=5.26) \); \( t(408) = -3.208, p = 0.001 \). A Cohen’s \( d \) of -.35 was found,
suggesting a difference is occurring. Hypothesis 2 was proved as Caucasian mothers on average had significantly lower scores on parental self-efficacy compared to Hispanic mothers.

**Research Question 3: Does the level of social support differ between Caucasian mothers and Hispanic mothers? Hypothesis 3: Hispanic mothers have a higher level of social support than Caucasian mothers.**

An independent samples T-test was performed to compare parental social support between Caucasian mothers and Hispanic mothers. There was no statistically significant difference between the scores for Caucasian mothers ($M=26.60$, $SD=7.64$) and Hispanic mothers ($M=26.59$, $SD=8.69$); $t(409) = .018$, $p = 0.986$. A Cohen’s $d$ of .001 was found.
DISCUSSION

Relationship between Parental Self-Efficacy and Social Support among Caucasian and Hispanic Mothers.

Results from this study support findings from previous studies that have shown parental self-efficacy and social support to be significantly and positively correlated (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Izzo, Weiss, Shanahan & Rodriguez-Brown, 2000; Ontai & Sano, 2008). Previous research (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Trivette & Dunst, 2005) also revealed that self-efficacy and social support are both strong influences on parents (e.g. self-esteem, social networks) and their parenting practices.

Along with the understanding that parental self-efficacy and social support are related, past research has demonstrated that the two constructs influence each other (Teti & Gelfand, 1991; Ontai & Sano, 2008; Cutrona, 1984; Gardner & Cutrona, 2004). Raikes and Thompson (2005) explained that when social support systems are weakened, parental self-efficacy diminishes as well. Additionally, Teti & Gelfand (1991) concluded that parental self-efficacy serves as a mediator to social support. Research has also made known that parental self-efficacy can be protected from life stressors by a strong social support system (Cutrona, 1984; Raikes & Thompson, 2005). This literature showed social support working as a mediator for self-efficacy.

Through past research, parental self-efficacy and social support have been shown to be mutually influencing variables. This relatedness reinforced the ecological systems theory of interdependence between systems. As self-efficacy increases, openness to social support also increases; as social support increases, more self-efficacy is acquired. If practitioners acquire knowledge of this relationship, then they can see the need to aid mothers in
identifying social support systems that are accessible to them, and, in turn, strengthen the mother’s self-efficacy.

**Parental Self-Efficacy among Caucasian and Hispanic Mothers**

There is a deficiency of literature in understanding how Hispanic mothers and Caucasian mothers compare on the domain of self-efficacy. This study began to explore this comparison; the data in this study found that the level of self-efficacy was significantly higher among Caucasian mothers compared to Hispanic mothers. However, given the possible range of self-efficacy scores (0-42), both Caucasian and Hispanic mothers had relatively high scores. Thus, mothers overall perceived themselves as competent in the parenting role.

Familialism, a sense of family loyalty, has been shown to be a strong value in the Hispanic culture (Forehand and Kotchick, 1996). A product of this familialism, sharing parenting responsibility among extended family members is a cultural norm (1996). Through the lens of Bandura’s theory of observational learning (Bandura, 1982), it can be suggested that as Hispanic mothers witness the communal parenting and apply this knowledge as they begin their own parenting, self-efficacy in the parenting role may increase. As more is learned about the extent of perceived parental self-efficacy and social support, the more adequately programs can be developed to reach this sector of the population.

**Social Support among Caucasian and Hispanic Mothers**

This study, as well as previous studies, has not clearly recognized a distinguishable difference between the levels of social support among Caucasian parents as compared to social support among Hispanic parents. However, both Caucasian and Hispanic mothers
had relatively high scores, given the possible range of social support scores (0-36). Previous literature suggests that Hispanic parents are more likely than non-Hispanic parents to depend on family members rather than friends as well as participate in a support system based on reciprocation (Vega & Kolody, 1985).

These findings may suggest that social service programs can tailor education and aid across the two ethnic groups; encouraging workers to continue to emphasize social support as a strong parenting influence. It would be valuable to researchers to examine how these findings relate to stress parents experience on a daily basis.

**Limitations**

The data used in this study has limitations. First, the data were drawn from a purposeful sample of 320 Caucasian and 119 Hispanic rural, low income mothers age 18 or older whose incomes were at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines (not a random sample). It is important to note that the mothers in this study were low-income, therefore encountering some level of stress in their lives. This study did not look at stress and its impact on self-efficacy or social support.

Additionally, each mother had at least one child twelve years of age or younger and lived in a county with a population size between 2,500 and 19,000 people. Therefore, the findings from this study are only transferable to mothers who have similar characteristics and live in comparable communities. Participants recruited were already receiving a formal source of social support through the service agencies they were recruited from. There views of social support may be different from a population not receiving this type of aid. Furthermore, the data is based on the mothers’ perceptions. It is unclear if mothers’ perceptions would be consistent with observable data (Johnson & Turner, 2003).
Second, distinct lengths of residence were not examined in this study, but could be influential in mothers establishing social support systems. Levels of social support could be dependent on length of residence status and should be researched further for deeper understanding. Also, the present study did not consider whether the Hispanic mothers had immigrated recently, nor did it look into whether the mothers interviewed were migrant workers or spouses of migrant workers. Both of these situations should be considered in future research.

Finally, a question posed in the social support scale asked mothers if they had professionals to talk with when they had a question about their child. It is unclear if the reference to professionals providing support is socially acceptable to the mothers participating in the study, especially for the Hispanic mothers who may be from a country where information or advice about child rearing is not sought from professionals.

Implications for Future Research

Observational data investigating the existence of social support and its relationship to parental self-efficacy could be beneficial in possessing a deeper understanding of the linkage between the two constructs and their influence on parent behaviors. Additionally, literature that observes parental stress in relation to parental self-efficacy and social support, as Jones and Prinze (2005) suggested, would be valuable to better understanding direct influences on parenting practices and parent-child interactions.

Cochran (1993) indicated that the forms of relationships parents have with others needs to be analyzed to further understand how those relationships may influence parenting behaviors. Future studies could explore the different types of relationships these mothers
had and examine how these variables influence parental self-efficacy, social support and parenting practices.

Finally, this study only looked at general parental self-efficacy when examining the concept in relation to social support. Two other levels of self-efficacy have been outlined by previous research and may be valuable to future researchers (Jones & Prinz, 2005). Task-related parental self-efficacy, specific childcare tasks (e.g., caring for a sick child), and narrow-domain parental self-efficacy, focusing on one parenting domain (e.g., discipline), are much more narrow when measuring self-efficacy than this study’s approach. Taking a task-related or narrow domain approach to measuring parental self-efficacy may be useful in obtaining greater insight into parents’ views and perceptions.

Summary

The data in this study revealed three findings: 1) parental self-efficacy and social support were significantly and positively correlated; 2) Hispanic mothers reported higher levels of self-efficacy than did Caucasian mothers; and 3) there was no significant difference between perceived levels of social support among Hispanic mothers as compared to Caucasian mothers. Findings in this study are consistent with earlier research findings; there is a correlation between parental self-efficacy and social support. Future research would benefit from expanding the data sample, narrowed measures of self-efficacy, and incorporating observational data.
APPENDIX:

Institutional Review Board Approval
Date: 1/12/2011
To: Samantha Young
   2403 Farndale Ave #8
   Ames, IA 50010

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Exploring the Relationship between Parental Self-Efficacy and Social Support Systems

The Co-Chair of the ISU Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed the project noted above and determined that the project:

☐ Does not meet the definition of research according to federal regulations.
☒ Is research that does not involve human subjects according to federal regulations.

Accordingly, this project does not need IRB approval and you may proceed at any time. We do, however, urge you to protect the rights of your participants in the same ways you would if IRB approval were required. For example, best practices include informing participants that involvement in the project is voluntary and maintaining confidentiality as appropriate.

Please also know that any change to this project must be communicated to the IRB to determine if the project has become research with human subjects requiring IRB approval.
REFERENCES CITED


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