



Research UPDATE

College of Education
and Human Services

Utah State University

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From the Associate Dean

Dear Colleagues:

The new academic year is in full swing and faculty in the College of Education and Human Services are as busy as ever. In this issue we feature just a few of the research projects in the Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development. We encourage you to look for opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing.

Sincerely,

Carol Strong

correlated with children's cognitive development, language development, and emotional regulation at both 24 and 36 months. But fathers who were depressed and reported dysfunctional interactions with their toddlers were less likely to engage in this type of play. Fathers' age and education were not related to father-toddler social toy play, and neither were children's gender and earlier development.

The impact of EHS on father-toddler play suggests that early intervention can promote father-child interactions that enhance early development. The results of this study, showing early contributions of father-toddler play, expand our understanding of the developmental value of father involvement in children's lives during their early years.

Playing with Daddy: A Positive Impact of Early Head Start



This brief research report is from a series of studies done as part of USU's local research partnership for Early Head Start research, with Lori Roggman as Principal Investigator and other researchers including Lisa Boyce, Gina Cook, Katie Christiansen, and DeAnn Jones. This is one of several related studies of the fathers in the local and national research samples.

Research on families in Early Head Start (EHS) has provided an opportunity to study fathers from low-income families. In our Utah sub-sample of the national EHS study, we have been looking at how the local Bear River EHS home-visiting program influenced a particular kind of father-toddler interaction, sharing toys during play. We have also examined how the complexity of this type of play is related to children's early development.

Our sample includes 74 fathers, mostly from two-parent working poor families. As part of in-home assessments when toddlers were 24 months old, we interviewed their fathers and videotaped a 10-minute semi-structured father-toddler play session. Trained observers rated the complexity of toy play from the videotapes. At both 24 and 36 months, we assessed children's social and cognitive development using standardized instruments.

Our results show a positive effect of this EHS program on father-toddler toy play. Results further show that greater complexity in father-toddler toy play at 24 months was

Issues of Aging

Maria Norton is an assistant professor of gerontology in the FCHD department. Her research program centers on geriatric mental health and the epidemiology of aging disorders. Maria and Jo Ann Tschanz (Psychology) have collaborated for the past nine years on research on aging and memory.



The Cache County Memory Study recently received a five-year funding renewal for \$10 million. The investigators will continue to study genetic and environmental factors affecting risk for development of dementia. In addition, the focus has been broadened to include the study of milder forms of cognitive impairment, with the goal of being able to differentiate individuals with mild impairment who go on to develop dementia from those who are experiencing normal age-related cognitive changes. With this enhanced understanding of the early predictive ability of cognitive testing, clinicians will be able to target interventions for individuals at greatest risk of developing dementia.

An ancillary project directed by Dr. Tschanz explores the extent to which the caregiving environment may alter the trajectories of cognitive and functional decline and accompanying behavioral changes in individuals with dementia.

Additional projects under development by Dr. Norton include studies of geriatric depression designed to address known problems of (to p. 2)

(underreporting by development of improved measurement approaches, and then to examine the relation between late-life depression and dementia risk and the moderating effects of psychosocial well-being. Another study by FCHD colleague Kathy Piercy will examine how caregivers address end-of-life issues when caring for their loved one with dementia.



Much About Marriage

Scot Allgood is an associate professor in family and human development with a specialty in marriage and family therapy. Dr. Allgood, along with other faculty

members and students, have been extensively involved with several projects funded by The Utah Governor's Commission on Marriage. Dr. Allgood describes these projects below.

A group of faculty and students representing Cooperative Extension, Family Studies, and the Marriage and Family Therapy Program collaborated to replicate a statewide survey of marriage. For the original study, conducted in Oklahoma, the investigators were able to identify public policy, education, and prevention issues to strengthen marriages. The random survey, with an oversampling of the lowest income families, was replicated in Utah in April of this year. These surveys have been prompted by the Department of Health and Human Services, whose spokesman reports that the single easiest way to reduce the welfare load in the country is to strengthen marriages. The data, while not completely analyzed, show that, Utahans marry younger and report higher levels of marital satisfaction. Also, those who participated in any type of premarital education reported being happier than those who did not. The full results of this survey will be available in November.

Another ongoing project is to follow-up with newlyweds who received a free video from the Governor's Commission on Marriage within a few months of their marriage. As expected with newlyweds, 2/3 of them reported being very happy in their marriage and those who had participated in any type of premarital education found it to be helpful. The majority of these couples reported being in debt when they married and not having any formal type of premarital education.

A third funded project was to train cooperative extension agents and other interested parties in the PREP model of relationship enhancement. This training was provided in May for 75 people who agreed to offer classes for at least 32 couples in return for the free certification. A number of

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classes have already been offered around the state and all couples are being recruited to participate in a three-month follow up study to assess the effectiveness of the program. The data collection for this program is in process.

A Positive Presence in Paraguay

Ann Austin is a professor of child development in the Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development. Her research interests include school readiness and school success, especially for children at-risk by virtue of family income or ethnicity. An additional research interest focuses on the impact of parasite infestation and caregiving environment on cognitive development for infants and toddlers in rural Paraguay. In the following paragraphs she describes her work in Paraguay.

Most of my work in Paraguay is with Pastoral del Nino, a non-profit, children's relief organization with headquarters in Asuncion, Paraguay. Pastoral is dedicated to the early positive development of Paraguayan children. It is run by paid employees and a large cadre of village volunteers. Pastoral volunteers make home visits in rural, remote rural, and barrio areas and run health and nutrition clinics. They encourage good health routines (e.g., handwashing, brushing teeth, proper disposal of human waste, immunizations, deworming procedures, etc.) and provide information on prenatal care, breast-feeding, and oral rehydration. Pastoral is also beginning to teach classes on parenting skills based on a program and materials I have helped Pastoral design, implement, and evaluate.



Baseline studies of child development, especially from birth to age 3,

are nonexistent in Paraguay, so I

am also helping Pastoral with basic evaluations of child development. Two years ago, several of my graduate students and I began helping Pastoral on an infant-toddler assessment project using the BSID-II and a modification

of the HOME Inventory. Currently, we are evaluating rural and slum children whose mothers have been involved in Pastoral's prenatal and early child health and nutrition programs and children whose mothers have not. Not surprisingly, maternal involvement in Pastoral's programs is significantly related to higher BSID-II MDI scores and to higher developmental scores for the cognitive-mental cluster.