

A STUDY TO EXAMINE THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG STRESS,  
RESOURCES, RACE, FAMILY STRUCTURE, AND PARENT  
INVOLVEMENT IN A GROUP OF HEADSTART PARENTS

by

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(ABSTRACT)

Many American families are experiencing a high degree of stress. Without sufficient resources to counteract this stress, these families ultimately become dysfunctional. Not only do they find it difficult to function in the home setting, but they also find it difficult to function in other social contexts, such as the school community.

It was hypothesized that family stress and insufficient resources can have a negative impact on home-school relations in general and parent involvement in particular.

It was the purpose of this study to (a) assess the level of parent involvement of a group of Headstart parents, (b) assess the family stress level and resources of these parents; (c) determine if there is a relationship among stress, resources, and parent involvement, as well as to determine the effect race and family structure have on parent involvement; and (d) identify support resources to assist parents in coping with the stressful events in their lives.

Fifty-three parents from a large, Virginia Headstart program were used in this study. Parental involvement was assessed by collecting data from Headstart records. In addition, parents were asked to respond to two inventories. These inventories--Family Inventory of Life Events (FILE) and Family Crisis Oriented Personal Scales (F-Copes)--were used to determine the stressful life events families faced while their children were enrolled in Headstart and to assess the resources available to these families for meeting the demands of these stressful events.

The raw data from the parent involvement assessment and the inventories were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSSX). Specifically, descriptive statistics, simple and multiple regression, and analysis of variance were used to analyze the selected variables and the interrelationships between these variables.

The results indicated that there is a negative relationship between stress and resources. Parents with fewer resources generally had higher stress levels. Family stress and resource levels had opposite effects on parent involvement. High stress levels were associated with low parent involvement, while high resource levels were associated with high parent involvement. Race and family structure had no effect on parent involvement for this sample.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Coalescing on the horizon are four demographic trends which have significant implications for two major American institutions--the home and school. The racial composition of this nation is taking on a different hue. By the year 2,000 (Hodgkinson, 1985), one out of every three Americans will be non-white. The number of Hispanics will increase from 14.6 to 47 million and the number of blacks from 26.5 million to 44 million over the next two decades. In addition, there will be a sizeable increase in the Asian-American population.

New family structures are evolving. Single-parent families and dual-career families, in particular, are supplanting the traditional family--working father, housewife mother, and 2.5 children. Of every 100 children born today, 12 children will be born out of wedlock, 40 will be born to parents who divorce before the child is 18, and 5 will be born to parents who separate (Hodgkinson, 1985).

The number of dual-career families is mushrooming as more and more women move into the labor force. Hodgkinson observed that more than 50% of women are working and this percentage is likely to increase. Phillips (1987) projected that three-quarters of school-age children will have a mother in the labor force by 1995.

Finally, poverty among children is becoming more pervasive. Currently, about 25% of all children--47% of black children, 40% of Hispanic children, and 10% of white children--are born poor and will spend some portion of their formative years in poverty (Newberger, Melnicoe, and Newberger, 1986). Because demographic trends indicate that poverty is on the increase, it is likely that poor children will be moving into the education system in greater numbers in the future.

As these trends manifest themselves, schools will be faced with new issues, problems, and demands. More children will be living in families that are experiencing stress as a result of minority status, new family structures, dual-career families, and poverty. The stresses and strains experienced by families will undoubtedly affect the way children function in the school setting. More than ever it will be imperative that the home and school work cooperatively to respond to the changing needs of the American family.

The question confronting educators and parents is how can the school and home work collaboratively to ensure school and life success for all children? This is a question that parents and educators must address if the school and home are to continue to respond to the legal mandate to educate the children of this nation.

## Background

America has evolved into a highly industrialized nation. Achieving this status, however, has exerted stress and pressure on our most fundamental unit of society--the family. As families have sought to respond to changing demands and developments in American society, the stress level within families has increased.

McCubbin and Thompson (1987) have identified the following nine categories as potential sources of stress within families: intra-family strains, marital strains, pregnancy and childbearing strains, finance and business strains, work-family transitions and strains, illness and family "care" strains, losses, transitions "in and out," and legal violations. Within these categories McCubbin and Thompson have identified life events which can affect relations within the family microcosm. A major focus of this study is to determine whether or not these potentially stressful events also affect relations between the home and school.

The Hill ABCX (cited in McCubbin and Patterson, 1983) and the Double ABCX paradigm (McCubbin and Patterson, 1983) provided the theoretical basis for this study. The stress paradigms help to explain the dynamics of stress, while the ecological paradigm offers a conceptual framework for understanding why families under stress are likely to

experience difficulty in establishing meaningful and productive relationships in other social settings.

The theory that grounds the ABCX models advances the tenet that life events and changes are inevitable and are potential sources of stress. The outcome of a stressful event, according to these models, depends on a family's crisis-meeting resources and how the family perceives the event. The ABCX model takes into consideration pre-crisis variables which can prevent a crisis, while the Double ABCX model takes into account the post-crisis variables which enable families to adapt after a crisis has occurred.

Families that do not have the resources to prevent a crisis or to adapt in the wake of a crisis can and do become dysfunctional. Consequently, these families are rendered helpless, unable to cope with demands within or outside of the family.

The ecological paradigm (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is based on the theory that individuals grow and develop within different social contexts. Not only do the social contexts in which individuals are physically present have an impact on their growth and development, but also those contexts in which they are not physically present, such as the political and legal systems, or parents' workplace.

These social contexts or environments can be envisioned as a series of concentric circles, with the center circle

representing the home. The home and the larger environments in which it is embedded are interdependent and interconnected. Reciprocal interactions exist between the various environments, compelling them to affect and be affected by each other.

The school is one of the larger environments encompassing the home. Because of the interdependent and interconnected relationship between these two institutions, they influence each other. Therefore, children's behavior and performance in the school setting are reflective to a great extent of home conditions and circumstances.

The stress models, in conjunction with the ecological model, can provide a framework for "assessing what is happening in the family and to the family" (Swick, 1984, p. 83) and how these interactions influence the functioning of family members in other social contexts.

### Purpose of the Study

Despite the interdependent relationship between the school and home, most parents are only marginally involved in schools (Dempsey, 1987). It is estimated (Davies, 1987) that only about one-third of schools have a substantial amount of parent involvement. Yet, there is an expanding body of theoretical and empirical evidence to support the tenet that home-school relations, and parent involvement in particular,



make a difference in children's school performance (Henderson, 1987). Considering the positive influence that parents can have on performance, school staff and administrators should work with families more closely to determine if there are in-home factors that might prevent parents from becoming involved in their children's education.

The ABCX stress models and the ecological model provide a framework for looking at some of the environmental factors which place demands on families and ultimately influence their relationship with the schools. A major implication growing out of the ecological and stress theories is that parent involvement might be increased if educators consider the life events or stressors that families are encountering. If schools are cognizant of family circumstances, they will be in a better position to facilitate parent involvement by collaboratively planning home-school programs that accommodate the diverse needs and levels of functioning of the families they serve.

Guided by the ecological and stress paradigms, it was hypothesized that two underlying factors--stress and coping resources--account for generally low parent involvement in a local Headstart program. Therefore, it was the purpose of this study to examine the relationship among stress, coping resources and parent involvement in a group of Headstart

parents, as well as to determine what effect race and family structure have on parent involvement.

Data collected for this study will be used to revise the Headstart resource handbook. The stress and resource instruments will inform the researcher about the kinds of stressful life events Headstart parents are encountering. Based on this information, the resource handbook will be revised to include support services that can appropriately meet the specific needs of Headstart parents.

#### Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between stress and parent involvement?
2. What is the relationship between resources and parent involvement?
3. What is the relationship among stress, resources, and parent involvement?
4. What effect do (a) race and (b) family structure have on stress?
5. What effect do (a) race and (b) family structure have on resources?
6. What effect do (a) race and (b) family structure have on parent involvement?

### Delimitations

To make this study manageable, it was delimited as follows:

1. This study was delimited to a group of Headstart parents who were classified as low income according to federal and/or local income guidelines.

2. The stressful life events and coping resources assessed in this study were delimited to those defined by the FILE (Family Inventory of Life Events) and F-Copes (Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales) assessment inventories (McCubbin and Patterson, 1987).

3. Parent involvement was delimited to participation in the following activities: school programs, parent conferences, classroom volunteering, parent meetings, and policy committees.

### Limitations

A causal-comparative or "ex post facto" design was used in this study. According to Isaac and Michael (1981), there are several possible threats to validity. They include:

1. Lack of control over independent variables
2. Being certain that the relevant causative factor is actually included among the factors under study
3. Inability to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between related factors

4. Locating existing groups of subjects who are similar in all respects except for their exposure to one variable.

#### Definition of Terms

Parent Involvement/Parent Participation--In this study, parent involvement and parent participation will refer to the following activities: school programs, parent conferences, classroom volunteering, parent meetings and policy committees.

Family--Two or more persons living together who are related by blood, marriage or adoption. This includes persons living in the household over an extended period of time and with whom family members have a long-term commitment (McCubbin and Patterson, et al., 1981).

Normative Events--Experiences which occur over the family life cycle: marriage, parenthood, adolescence, etc.

Non-normative Events--Family experiences which are sudden, unexpected, and some times life-threatening.

Intra-familial--Within the family context.

Extra-familial--External to the family context.

Stressor--Normative or non-normative life event that has the potential for causing stress.

### Significance of the Study

A formalized body of research on various aspects of home-school relations, particularly parent involvement, is evolving (Swick, 1985; Epstein, 1988; Gotts, 1987; Moles, 1987; Henderson, 1987; Williams, 1981). Researchers are gathering data on the family system and its relationship with other social settings, such as the school; constructing paradigms for viewing parent involvement; introducing tools that can be used to gather quantitative and qualitative information about families; and developing strategies and guidelines for enhancing and promoting parent involvement.

As the research continues to expand, it is likely that these studies will provide a reservoir of theoretical and empirical data from which school administrators and staff can draw fresh ideas and develop new perspectives on involving parents in the schools.

Increasing parent involvement can be one of the most important outcomes of the current reform movement. The reform climate provides administrators, teachers, and specialists an opportunity to develop programs that will increase parent involvement in the public schools and rebuild confidence in the American education system.

Chavkin and Williams (1987) recognize administrators as "necessary catalysts and leaders" in the reform movement, especially as it relates to parent involvement. Epstein

(1987) points out that administrators can be successful in helping schools involve parents by "managing, supporting, funding, and recognizing" parent involvement as an important component of the education process (p. 133). Moreover, she suggests that one function of administrators should be keeping teachers and appropriate staff abreast of parent involvement research findings and developments.

There is a "dearth of useful and organized information on promoting parent involvement in schools," observes Epstein (1987, p. 120). This study is being conducted to contribute to the research on parent involvement and to sensitize administrators and school staff to the fact that family stress is a factor that might inhibit a necessary school component--parent involvement.

### Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. This chapter includes the introduction, background, assumptions, purposes, research questions, limitations, definition of terms, and the significance of the study. Chapter II contains a review of related research and literature. Chapter III contains a description of the subjects, the instrumentation, procedures, and analyses used for the investigation. Chapter IV contains the results of the data analyses. Finally, Chapter V

presents a summation of the findings along with conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Educators and parents generally agree that the home and school should not function as separate entities. National polls (NEA 1981; Gallup Poll 1986) indicate that parents and educators favor increased home-school collaboration. A partnership relationship which combines the knowledge, skills, and experiences of parents and teachers has been proposed by some educators (Epstein, 1988; Rich, 1988, Comer, 1986; Cattermole and Robinson, 1985; Andrews, 1981). Such an approach, according to these educators, could provide valuable input regarding the planning, organization, implementation, evaluation, and decision-making with respect to schools and education.

Dorothy Rich (1985), founder and president of the Home and School Institute, asserts that ties between home and school are strengthened when parents are actively involved in their children's education. Rich compares the ideal home-school relationship to the right and left sides of the brain. "Both are necessary. Both are complementary, nonduplicative, unique, and vital" (p.9).

Chapter II is divided into four sections. The first section gives a brief historical overview of home-school relations in the United States. The second section examines the ecological relationship between the home and school. The



third section reviews empirical research related to the effect of parent involvement on school achievement. Finally, drawing upon stress theory, the last section looks at family stress and its relationship to parent involvement.

### Historical Overview of Home-school Relations

During the early history of this country the roots of public education were inextricably tied to the home, neighborhood, and community (Gordon, 1976). The functions of these two social institutions were clear and explicit. The schools were specifically delegated the task of "schooling". They were to teach reading, writing, arithmetic, and to reinforce the attitudes, beliefs, and values adhered to in the home and community. The home (Hughes, 1965), guided by the religious teachings of the church, was responsible for the moral and social development of the child.

The home-school relationship was not characterized by equity (Schwartz, 1969). Clearly, the community played the dominant role in the relationship. The community, hired the teachers, told them what to teach, and supervised both their professional and personal conduct. Despite the inequity, there existed a strong, close, relationship between the school and home, though not necessarily always a harmonious one.

After the American Revolution, the schools became a more powerful and pervasive force in American society. Thomas Jefferson played a leading role in elevating schools to a prominent social position. He was among the first to view the schools as a mechanism for serving national interests and bringing about socio-political change. Convinced that an informed citizenry was essential to strengthening democracy and safeguarding liberty in the new Republic, Jefferson embraced education as a means for accomplishing these ends (Ikenberry, 1974).

When the migratory masses from Europe descended on this country in the early part of the nineteenth century, the schools were delegated the responsibility of educating them. Guided by the "melting pot" theory, the schools attempted to provide a uniform education that would move these newcomers into the mainstream of American culture.

When urbanization and industrialization shifted economic survival from the home to the "work place", the life skills taught in the home in pre-industrial America became obsolete. New skills were needed to keep pace with scientific and technological advances that had transformed America from an agrarian society to an industrial one. Because the family was not capable of teaching these skills, it ceased to function as the basic education agency for society. Instead,

the school assumed the role of fitting children with the skills and competencies needed for the work world.

All states had some form of free public education by 1912. As an institutionalized social phenomenon, schools developed a culture of their own and established boundaries to define their sphere of authority. Though the ties between home and school remained strong, it was clear that the schools played the dominant role in home-school relations. Parents directly transferred their authority to the schools, noted Comer (1986), but by and large maintained an indirect, meaningful, and constant relationship with the schools.

By the 1930's and especially after World War II, close ties between school and home began to attenuate. Consolidation of school districts, advances in science and technology, and a myriad of socio-political changes, psychologically and physically, distanced the home and school. Between 1932 and 1977, the number of school districts precipitously dropped from 127,000 to 16,000 (Morphet, 1982). Larger school districts evolved supported by bureaucratic structures which were impersonal and most often out of touch with the needs and concerns of the community. Because many schools and communities were not in close proximity, school administrators, responsible for making decisions and formulating policies, did not have face-to-face or direct contact with the parents and students

affected by their decisions. Consequently, communication between these two institutions was weakened and the level of trust decreased (Comer, 1986).

Mass transportation and television also made a difference in home-school relations. Transportation enabled teachers and students to work at and attend schools outside their communities. As a result, the level of interaction that existed between teachers, students, and parents when they were all members of the same community was no longer possible.

Further, television, which presented opposing views and conflicting value systems, evoked conflict by encouraging parents to look at issues from other perspectives. Whereas shared philosophies and values facilitated positive relations between school and home in earlier years, opposing philosophies and values created conflict between these institutions in later years.

Finally, Sputnik, desegregation, the War on Poverty, the Civil Rights Movement, and the women's movement were some of the major social issues which brought into question the role of the schools. Sharp disagreement over these and other issues has prevailed, with both institutions questioning the other's authority and responsibility. In contrast to former years, observed Comer (1986), "The authority of the home is less often transferred to the school, and the authoritarian

style of the school is less well-accepted by students, parents, and staff" (p. 430). Presently, neither the school nor the home dominates the home-school relationship. Role ambiguity characterizes the relationship and conflict persists.

Yet, the number of family problems which beg resolution are mounting. The stresses and strains of daily living created by poverty, dual-career families, new family structures, and the special needs of minorities, affect both the home and the school. Because children are part of both settings, the problems that impinge on the child's functioning in the home subsequently make a difference in how he/she functions in school.

What should be the role of the school and home continues to generate fervent debate, argument, and conflict. In order to respond to the demands that societal changes are placing on children and families, the home and school must reconcile their differences.

The function of the home and school have and will continue to differ (Lightfoot, 1978). Nevertheless, the functions of both institutions are vital to children, families, and to the progress of this nation as a whole.

From an ecological perspective, a home-school partnership offers a solution to the conflict that exists between home and school. This perspective focuses on the

interdependent relationship between the home and school and affords these institutions a rationale for working together in a collaborative effort to ensure children's school and life success.

### The Ecological Relationship Between Home and School

The ecological perspective takes as its point of departure the view that the family system is not autonomous, but is in a reciprocal, dynamic relationship with its external environment.

Four basic premises underpin the paradigm: (a) the ecological environment is a set of nested, interlocking systems--microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem; (b) the interconnections of these systems are decisive to the family; (c) systems in which family members are not directly involved can profoundly affect their development; and (d) collectively, the various environmental settings constitute distinctively different subcultures and cultures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Any system in which a family member is physically present is described by Bronfenbrenner as a microsystem. The school, home, church, and neighborhood are examples of microsystems. The mesosystem represents the inter-relationship that exists between two or more microsystems (i.e. home and school or home, school, and neighborhood).

In contrast to the microsystem, an exosystem affects family members even though they may not be physically present in that setting. The parents' work place, the legal or political system are examples of exosystems. Finally, the consistencies and common characteristics that exist between these lower systems collectively comprise the macrosystem.

Viewed separately, the home and school are microsystems. Viewed in relationship to each other, these two institutions constitute a mesosystem. It is the home-school mesosystem, in particular, which comes to bear on home-school relations and subsequently on parent involvement. Because the two microsystems are interactive, interdependent, and interconnected, the nature and quality of one directly and indirectly influences the other. Therefore, how a child functions in the home environment will determine how he/she will function in the school environment and vice versa.

During the 60's, studies investigating the effect of the home on cognitive development proliferated. These studies grew out of new insights regarding the relationship between environmental factors and intellectual development (Hunt, 1961; Bloom, 1964; Coleman, 1966; Cole and Bruner, 1972; Hess and Shipman, 1968) and the belief that changing the environment of impoverished children would enhance their cognitive skills.

The intellectual, political and social climate of the 60's encouraged educators, psychologists and social workers to establish preschool programs. Three different types of programs emerged--home-based, classroom-based, and classroom-home-based combinations.

Generally, these programs operated from the following tenets: (a) intelligence is not fixed but is modifiable; (b) low-income children are deficient in experiences that facilitate school success (deficit model); (c) enriching the home environment positively affects children's cognitive abilities; and (d) the mother is in the most optimal position to mediate learning because of her mutual and enduring relationship with the child (Gordon, 1975; White, 1975; Levenstein, 1977; Karnes, 1970). Parents were central to these programs and were encouraged and trained to become active participants in their children's education.

The Parent Education Infant and Toddler Project (Jester and Guinagh, 1983) typifies the home-based programs developed in the 60's. This program used paraprofessionals to train parents. Intervention began when the children were three months old and continued until they were three years old. During the weekly home visits, paraprofessionals demonstrated activities that parents could use with the child during the week. The expectation was that the home environment would become a more positive influence on the child as a result of



the instructions and suggestions given the mothers during the home visits.

Language development was a major thrust of the home-based programs developed by Karnes (1977), Levenstein (1977) and Schaefer (1977). These researchers recognized language as a mediator of learning. It was assumed that the child had an innate capacity for learning language and that mothers were in a unique position to foster and enhance the child's language ability.

During the home visits, the mother was trained to engage the child in meaningful verbal interactions. A major purpose of these verbal exchanges was to extend and expand the child's vocabulary. The researchers firmly believed that bombarding and enveloping children with language-rich experiences during the preschool years would make a difference in their school performance.

The center-based programs (Deutsch, 1972; Herzog, 1974; Sprigle, 1974), which were conducted in the classroom were similar in scope and content to home-based programs. These programs, designed primarily for three- and four-year olds, exposed children to a variety of enriching and stimulating experiences that were developmentally appropriate and promoted multi-sensory learning. As in the home-based programs, children's cognitive development and parent involvement were prominent features of these programs.

Weikart (1984) and Gray and Klaus (1983), attempting to maximize learning, used both a classroom-based and home-based approach. Teachers worked with children in the classroom and also spent time in the home working with parents. In essence the child had the best of two worlds. First, the parents with whom the child had an ongoing relationship, had an opportunity to expand and refine their parenting skills by learning more about child development from professionals and para-professionals. Second, having the child in the school setting provided the parents an opportunity to establish a relationship with a significant societal institution. Finally, teachers, as a result of gaining more insight into home conditions, were able to structure and modify curricula to more closely meet the needs of the child.

Using short-term and longitudinal data, the aforementioned researchers, as well as others, endeavored to answer a major question. Did early intervention, with a strong parent component, make measurable differences in children's school achievement after the program ceased?

Consistently, program evaluations showed that short-term cognitive gains were made as a result of intervention. It was also reported that these gains often "washed out" by the time the child reached third grade. Subsequent findings, however, have called this "wash out" phenomenon into question.

The Consortium for Longitudinal Studies (1983) conducted a comprehensive and indepth study, of the intervention programs conducted in the sixties. It reported that independently and collectively these programs produced both short-term and long-term gains. Findings showed that the programs increased individual scores on intelligence and achievement tests three to four years after intervention ceased; program children continued to outperform the control group throughout most of the elementary school years; program children were less likely to be retained or placed in special classes than those in the control group; self-esteem was high for program participants; and parents of program participants held higher expectations for their children.

A major implication drawn from these studies is that parent involvement is a key factor in the positive outcomes produced by these programs. In commenting on the consortium's findings, Lazar (1983), concluded that close contact between school and home and increased parent involvement are probably more important than school staff ever anticipated.

Subsequent research has overwhelmingly confirmed the findings of the Consortium. In addition, both past and recent research lend support to the ecological perspective and has compelled educators and lay people alike to take a

serious look at the key role parent involvement plays in children's school achievement.

#### Parent Involvement As A Key Factor In School Achievement

Parent involvement is an issue that is moving upward on the agenda of the education reform movement. Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners have recognized parents as an essential component of effective schools. President Reagan and his education advisors (Education Week, 1985) cited parent involvement and home-school collaboration as important ingredients for promoting excellence in education.

Researchers (Hawley and Rosenholtz; 1983, Purkey and Smith, 1983; Fullan, 1985) have identified parent involvement as a critical factor in effective schools. Practitioners (Collins, Moles, and Cross, 1982; Burns, 1982) have realized the positive outcomes of parent involvement.

As in the 60's, how the role of the family, especially the mother, affects cognitive development and school performance is still a major focus of parent involvement research. Parent education programs, homework, home tutoring, and such in-school activities as volunteering or parent conferences, are frequently used strategies to strengthen the home-school relation and promote parent involvement.

### Parent Education

Parent education has proven to be a most productive strategy for involving parents in their children's education. This strategy is grounded in the tenets that (a) parents play a primary and enduring role in their children's education; (b) parents have skills and competencies and can be empowered to affect what happens to them and their children; and (c) information and training can greatly enhance parents' skills, competencies, and general knowledge (Beecher, 1984; Gordon, 1975; White, 1975; Honig and Lally, 1977; Nimnicht et al., 1977;). Schools have used parent education exclusively or in conjunction with other parent involvement strategies for increasing student achievement.

Cochran and Henderson (1986), operating from an ecological perspective, conducted an intensive and comprehensive parent education program. This program involved 160 families from 10 Syracuse neighborhoods who had three-year-old children. A primary goal of the program was to strengthen families by helping parents build social networks outside of the immediate family that could link them to a variety of supportive services. As the children approached school age, special emphasis was placed on helping parents establish positive relationships with the schools so that they would become active participants in their children's education.

Families were involved in the program for twenty-four months. When the children moved into formal school systems, researchers began collecting follow-up data. Children's performance was evaluated using school records and teacher evaluations. These data were closely analyzed using a number of variables--demographic characteristics, parent-child interactions, and home-school communication. Generally, the findings indicated that there was a positive relationship between parents' involvement in the program and their children's school performance.

Comer (1980) integrated a parent education component into the parent program at the Yale Child Study Center. Parent education workshops were held during the summer and the regular school year. These workshops were designed to acquaint parents with the academic and social programs of the school and to help them develop skills and behaviors that had a positive impact on their children's academic performance.

A variety of evaluative methods revealed that parent education, used in conjunction with other types of involvement, increased student attendance, reduced discipline problems, minimized parent-staff conflict and increased academic performance.

An in-depth comparative study of 29 programs, using parent education models, was conducted by Goodson and Hess (1975). These researchers collected evaluation data from

each of the programs and reviewed these data in light of the following criteria: (a) the intensity of training; (b) program content; (c) teacher-parent ratio; and (d) delivery.

Program effectiveness was based on children's short-term and long-term gains on intelligence tests and differences between the experimental and control groups on such performance indicators as retention and absenteeism. Collectively, the programs had significant effects on children's I. Q. and other measures of school performance.

Differences in the delivery of parent education training were the focus of a longitudinal study conducted by Gotts (1980). Project Hope involved parents of three- to five-year olds in three different types of parent education training. Parents in Group A received only T. V. lessons with related follow-up activities; Group B received T. V. lessons plus a visit from a paraprofessional; and Group C received the T. V. lessons, the visit and, a playgroup session for the children.

Findings from the first evaluation showed that the children whose parents participated in the project outperformed the control group on two measures (Appalachia Preschool Test and the Frostig Test of Visual Perception). Further, the groups receiving parent training visits (B & C) not only performed better than the T.V. group (A) on the above two measures, but also did significantly better than group A on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test.

Subsequent evaluations--five and seven years later-- showed that the children whose parents had both the T. V. and home education training continued to remain ahead of the children whose parents had been given only the T. V. training. The latter group had lower grade point averages, lower test scores on basic skills tests, and lower attendance rates.

#### Homework and Home Tutoring

While homework and home tutoring are used to a lesser extent to foster parent involvement, studies indicate that they are promising strategies. Findings (Broxie, 1987; Van Cleve, 1985; Epstein, 1984; Paschal, 1984; McDermott, 1984;) have shown that children do improve academically when parents assist them with homework. Further, improvement seems to be a function of the quality of assistance.

Home tutoring is gaining popularity, due to its major proponent, Dorothy Rich. Rich (1987) readily points out that the home-learning activities developed by the Home and School Institute do not fit into the traditional homework category. According to Rich, these activities provide opportunities for parents to teach basic motivation skills, and attitudes to children as they engage in daily activities. She firmly believes that the kinds of interactions these activities



encourage between parent and child have an observable influence on school behavior.

Rich's unwavering commitment to this type of parent involvement grew out of her dissertation study. After exposing an experimental group to eight home-learning lessons, Rich compared them to a control group. Scores on reading and math tests were used as indicators of the effectiveness of the home-learning activities. The findings showed that the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group on the various measures.

Rich (1987) cites two other studies, Project Help and the Parent-School Partnership Project, as examples of the positive influence home learning activities can have on achievement. Project Help was conducted with low-income children and the Parent-School Partnership Project was conducted with special education children. Both studies reported increased performance for all groups involved in the home-learning. In addition, the Parent-School Partnership Project reported that most of the children were eventually mainstreamed into the regular classroom

While longitudinal data are needed to assess the long-term effects of home tutoring, the short-term studies suggest that this strategy has the potential for influencing school performance.

### In-School Activities

Finally, in-school activities--parent conferences, PTA and PTO, volunteering, and visitation--are used frequently to involve parents. Coleman (1987) in looking at the differences in achievement between private and public schools, observed that student achievement was higher in private schools. Close scrutiny of the evaluation data revealed that a larger percentage of private school parents were involved in PTA, volunteering and visitation than public school parents. Moreover, Coleman reported that private school parents, generally, have more frequent contact with the school than public school parents.

Using a nationally representative sample of American households, Stevenson and Baker (1987) tested the hypothesis that children whose parents were involved in PTO and who attended parent conferences performed better in school. The researchers found support for this hypothesis, concluding that parents who are involved in school activities, such as PTO, are more likely to have children who are academically successful.

Findings from studies examining the affects of parental involvement in education training programs, home tutoring, homework, and various school-related activities have by and large been positive. The research literature has clearly shown that parent involvement is a key factor in school

success and the evidence to support this tenet continues to grow (Henderson, 1987).

### Stress As A Barrier to Parent Involvement

Even though there is well-documented evidence showing a positive relationship between parent involvement and school achievement, home-school relations are, at best, tenuous and parent involvement generally low in most schools. Some researchers (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Swick, 1984) suggest that what is happening to and within families can have an impact on how families function in other microsystems or settings. In essence, life events can cause stress which might subsequently act as a barrier to parent involvement.

McCubbin and Patterson (1983) define stress as a "state which arises from an actual or perceived demand-capability imbalance in the family's functioning...and is characterized by a non-specific demand for adjustment or adaptive behavior" (p. 10). Stress, explains McCubbin and Patterson, is not an absolute condition but varies as a function of family characteristics, the nature of the stressful situation, and the psychological and physical well-being of family members. Stressors, as distinct from stress, are the specific life events that place demands on the family.

The ABCX and Double ABCX models provide a framework for viewing stress in families (McCubbin and Patterson, 1983).

In the ABCX model, a, the stressor interacts with b, family resources, and c, the family's perception of the stressor to produce x, the crisis. If the nature of the stressor is such that factors b and c can not offset it, the stressor moves to a crisis phase, bringing the Double ABCX model into play.

The Double ABCX model, an expanded version of the ABCX model, takes into account post-crisis variables. aA in the model, referred to as the "pile-up factor", represents the contexts in which the crisis takes place. These contexts can include the hardships associated with the crisis, other stressors which are occurring concomitantly, as well as the residue from past stressful events. bB and cC, as in the ABCX model, represent the family's resources and perception of the crisis. Whereas b and c determine whether a stressor becomes a crisis, factors bB and cC determine how families adapt in the wake of a crisis.

Families are not static. Throughout the life span they move through various stages or transitions (McGoldrick and Carter, 1980; Duvall, 1977). At each stage, stressors emerge which place demands on the family system. How families respond to these demands is contingent upon their resources and their perception of the stressor. Families that have adequate personal, family or social resources have the capability for coping with the demands of stressors and subsequently perceive stressors as manageable. These

families can either prevent a stressor from reaching a crisis level or reorganize their lives to adapt in the aftermath of a crisis. Conversely, families who do not have adequate resources are unable to cope with the demands of stressors and perceive the stressor as unmanageable. These are the families that ultimately become dysfunctional.

Stressors fall within two categories--normative or non-normative (McCubbin and Patterson, 1981). Normative stressors are those life events that can be expected or predicted, such as marriage or parenthood. Non-normative stressors, on the other hand, are unexpected and unpredictable, such as chronic illness or accidental death.

Normative or predictable stressors emerge at specific times during the life cycle while non-normative stressors can occur at any point during the life cycle. There are 11 characteristics which distinguish non-normative stressors from normative stressors (Figley, 1983):

- 1) the amount of time one has to prepare;
- 2) previous experience with the stressor;
- 3) sources of guidance available to manage the stressor;
- 4) the extent to which others have experienced the stressor;
- 5) the amount of time in a "crisis" state;

- 6) the degree to which there is a sense of loss of control or helplessness;
- 7) loss;
- 8) disruption and destruction;
- 9) danger experienced by people exposed to the stressor;
- 10) the quantity and quality of the emotional impact of the stressor, and
- 11) medical problems associated with exposure to the stressor (p. 14).

Predictably, researchers have studied non-normative stressors of greatest interest and concern to society (McCubbin and Patterson, 1981). Chronic illness (Patterson and McCubbin, 1983), drug abuse (Needle, Glynn and Needle, 1983; Kovacs, 1975), occupational stress (McCubbin and Olson, 1980), and family violence (Gelles, 1980; Stith, Rosen, and Little, 1988; Barrett, Sykes, and Byrnes, 1986) are some of the non-normative stressors that researchers have examined.

Collectively, these studies have sought to delineate the hardships associated with these stressful events, to identify the coping strategies that various families use to respond to these events, and to assess the impact that such events have on family members and the family system as a whole.

Research on normative stressors has tended to cluster around three areas of interest (McCubbin and Patterson,

1981): (a) definitions of the concept normative, relating normative events to stress and the various life cycle stages; (b) examining "typical" life events such as parenthood and retirement which are experienced by most families; and (c) looking at groups of both normative and non-normative stressful events that are likely to surface in certain age groups, e.g., young and old.

Olson, McCubbin, et al. (1983) have dealt extensively with cluster "a." They identified the following seven stages in the family life cycle:

Stage I - young married couples without children

Stage II - couples with preschool children

Stage III - couples with school-age children

Stage IV - couples with adolescents

Stage V - couples with whose children are moving out of  
the family household

Stage VI - couples without children

Stage VII - families in retirement.

Subsequently, these stages were used by McCubbin and his colleagues to look at family life along five major theoretical dimensions--family types, family resources, family stress and changes, family coping, and family satisfaction. A major purpose of this study was to identify the various stressors families encounter over the life cycle.

A sample of 2,692 individuals from intact families (couples, mother, father, children) was used in the study. This was a geographically diverse population, with a large percentage of families belonging to middle and upper socioeconomic levels.

A survey was used to determine which stressful life events were most prevalent for families at each of the life cycle stages. The most frequently reported stresses and strains for these families were: intra-family strains, work strains, illness, losses, pregnancy, financial strains, marital strains, and family transitions.

For stages II, III, and IV, families with school-age children, the most frequently reported stresses and strains were: financial, intra-family, work-family, illness and pregnancy for Stage II and intra-family, financial and work-family strains for Stages III and IV.

In addition to the broad categories of stress identified by McCubbin and his colleagues, various normative stressful events have been studied by other researchers. It has been reported that dual-career families, all things being equal, are likely to experience more stress than single career families. For example, increased expenses for childcare and the increase in the number of latchkey children (Stroman, 1982; Halpern, 1987) are added sources of stress associated with dual-career families. It is also reported (Bryson and



Bryson, 1978) that when both parents are working mothers generally do a disproportionate amount of the childcare and household tasks, creating yet another source of stress for these families.

Divorce, which has become so common it is considered a normative stressor (McCubbin and Figley, 1983), can occur at any stage of the life cycle. By and large, divorce has negative consequences, disrupting family life and forcing family members to undergo a process of reorganization.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) reported that fear, anger, sadness, rejection, and worry are some of the behaviors children might manifest when families are undergoing divorce. Moreover, the family is likely to experience a decline in its standard of living, role ambiguity and have problems reestablishing a social network (Kitson and Raschke, 1983; Mann, 1983).

Divorce has dramatically increased the number of single parents. Nock (1987), citing 1984 census data, noted that 6 million children live in single-parent homes, mostly with divorced mothers. Single-parent families face more life changes and potential stressors than traditional families. Task and responsibility overload, decreased finances, fewer support and social ties make more complex the task of parenting for single heads of households (Weinraub and Wolf, 1983).

Finally, poverty and minority status intensify the impact of normative and non-normative stressors for many families. The poor, especially minorities, undergo an inordinate degree of stress because of chronic economic insecurity, inadequate housing, lack of affordable medical care, inadequate education, job discrimination, and high unemployment rates (McAdoo, 1983; Halpern, 1987). Moreover, psychological and often physical distance separate these families from the mainstream of American culture, cutting them off from needed support systems.

"Stress is life and life is stress," writes Figley (1983, p. 5). Over the life cycle, all families encounter stressors, with some families experiencing a greater number of stressors than others. When families do not have the personal, family, or community resources to cope with these stressors, a demand-capability imbalance arises, causing the family system to malfunction or become dysfunctional.

Malfunctional or dysfunctional families are in a precarious state. These families, constrained by stressful life events, are not in a position to interact with or become productively involved in external systems, such as the school. As a result, they are not likely to be involved in their children's education. As Swick (1984) observes, these families may need support services from the school rather than involvement opportunities.

Therefore, prior to developing parent involvement programs, schools must first be aware of the stressors or "pile-up" factors (a, aA) that are impinging on family members. Second, they must determine whether or not families have the resources (b, bB) to cope with these stressors or crises. Finally, schools must provide direct and/or indirect support services to families who do not have the needed resources to offset the demands of stressful life events.

#### Chapter Summary

Interest in establishing positive home-school relations is not novel. Historically, concerted efforts have been launched by educators and lay persons to create productive, meaningful relationships between home and school. A rich body of empirical research provides support for the tenet that a home-school partnership is necessary to advance the goals of education. The task before parents and educators is first to identify those factors that hinder home-school relations and parent involvement and second to develop plans of action that will offset or eradicate these factors.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### The Setting

The site of this study is a Headstart program, implemented by a large Virginia public school system. The program is funded by both local and federal funds with the local government providing the greatest percentage of support (over 60%). This program serves a racially and ethnically diverse population of three- and four-year olds. There are 42 Headstart classes located in 26 different schools throughout the county. Each class enrolls a maximum of 18 children and is taught by an aide and a certified teacher.

A primary goal of the program is to provide low-income preschool children an enriched education program that promotes physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive development. That (a) intervention can make a significant difference in later academic achievement, and (b) parents should be actively involved in their children's education are two major tenets that underpin the Headstart philosophy.

Parent involvement is a salient aspect of the program. In accordance with federal mandate, parents are integrated into every level of the Headstart organization. In addition, strong emphasis is placed on parent training and parent education.

### Population and Subjects

The subjects selected for this study were parents whose children were enrolled in Headstart during the 1987-1988 school year. These parents were chosen as the target population because they were asked to recall events that happened in the family while their children were enrolled in Headstart. It was assumed that parents from earlier years would recall with less accuracy the events that happened to them during the year their children were in Headstart.

Twenty percent of all Headstart children fall within the special needs category, the over-income category or both. The subjects used in this study were drawn from the 80% of Headstart parents who are classified strictly as income-eligible, according to the poverty guidelines set forth by the federal/local government.

A request was made to the Assistant Superintendent of Planning and Organizational Development to use the 1987-1988 parent group in the study. A sample of 53 parents participated in the study.

### Instrumentation

Two self-report instruments were used to assess the stress and resource levels of the parents in this study. The Family Inventory of Life Events (FILE) was used to record

expected (normative) and unexpected (non-normative) life events and changes experienced by family members. The F-Copes (Family Coping Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales) was used to assess the families' internal and external support resources.

The FILE index consists of 73 items categorized into nine subscales: intra-family strains, finance and business strains, marital strains, pregnancy and childbearing strains, work-family transitions and strains, illness and family care strains, losses, transitions "in and out," and legal strains.

Intra-family Strains. This subscale is two dimensional--conflict and parenting strains--and consists of 17 items. Twelve of the items are related to conflict between family members and five of the items are related to difficulties associated with the parenting role.

Marital Strains. The four items on this scale measure stressors in the marital relationship resulting from sexual or separation issues.

Pregnancy and Childbearing Strains. These four items are related to problems arising from pregnancy or adding a new member to the family by adoption or birth.

Finance and Business Strains. The 12 items on this subscale fall into two categories, family finances and family business. The nine items related to family finances assess

the demands on the family's monetary resources. Three items are related to problems associated with personal investments.

Work-Family Transitions and Strains. This is a ten-item, two-dimensional subscale, focusing on work transitions and family transitions and work strains. The 4 items that relate to work transitions record information about family members who have or are moving in or out of the work force. Eight items refer to work-related problems or moves made by the family or one of its members.

Illness and Family "Care" Strains. This subscale has three categories--illness onset and child care, chronic illness strains, and dependency strains. The four items pertaining to illness onset reflect dependency needs resulting from illness or injury of a family member or friend or child care problems. Chronic illness strains consist of two items related to an unexpected illness or continued difficulties associated with a chronic illness. The two items related to dependency strains provide information about family members who require excessive care and help.

Losses. These six items record information about losses due to the death of a family member or friend and due to severed relationships.

Transitions "In and Out". Information about family members moving in or out of the home is the focus of these six items.

Legal. The five items on this scale are related to family members who are law offenders.

The F-Copes Scale is comprised of 30 items falling within five subscales: reframing, passive appraisal, social supports, community support and spiritual support. Reframing and passive appraisal are internal coping strategies (McCubbin, 1981). When a family reframes a problem, it operates from a positive stance, strongly believing that family members can find a satisfactory solution to the problem. Family members who passively appraise the problem take a "wait and see" approach, preferring to see how the problem will evolve before making a response.

External coping strategies include the use of extra-familial support systems. Families might rely on social supports (relatives, friends, neighbors), community support (public assistance) or spiritual support (church, minister, supreme being).

In addition, to the data provided by the stress and resource measures, parent involvement information and specific demographic data were obtained from the Headstart records. The demographics of interest were race and family structure (two-parent/single parent).



## Procedures

A random sample of 100 parents was drawn from the 1987-1988 low-income group. A letter was sent to these parents by the researcher to request their participation in the study. Parents were asked to return a consent form in a self-addressed envelope to the Headstart office. The researcher followed up with a phone call to give further explanation about the study to parents who agreed to participate, and to talk to parents who decided not to participate or did not respond to the letter.

Data collection was confined to three areas--frequency of parent participation in the Headstart program, assessment of the family stress level, and assessment of the family's resource level. Parent involvement was limited to five types of activities: in-school programs, volunteering, in-school parent conferences, parent meetings, and policy committees. A weighted score based on how often parents attended various activities was given to each parent. The family stress and resource levels for each parent were measured using the Family Inventory of Life Change and Events (FILE) and the Family Crisis Orientation Personal Evaluation Scales (F-Copes).

## Analyses

The raw data were obtained from parent involvement records and the F-Copes and FILE inventories. SPSSX was used to analyze these data. The six research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics, simple regression, multiple regression, and analysis of variance. The questions and the statistical measures are related as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between stress and parent involvement?

(descriptive statistics, simple regression)

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between resources and parent involvement?

(descriptive statistics, simple regression)

Research Question 3: What is the relationship among stress, resources, and parent involvement?

(descriptive statistics, multiple regression)

Research Question 4: What effect do (a) race and (b) family structure have on stress?

(descriptive statistics, analysis of variance and multiple regression)

Research Question 5: What effect do (a) race and (b) family structure have on coping resources?

(descriptive statistics, analysis of variance, and multiple regression)

Research Question 6: What effect do (a) race and (b) family structure have on parent involvement?

(multiple regression)

### Chapter Summary

Fifty-three parents in a large Virginia public school Headstart program participated in the study. Records from the Headstart office were used to collect data regarding the parents' involvement in the program. In addition, parents responded to questions on two inventories, The Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes (FILE) and The Family Crisis Orientation Personal Scales (F-Copes). The former provided information relating to family stress, and the latter, information relating to family resources. Distribution and collection of the inventories were conducted by Headstart family assistance workers. The data were analyzed to answer the six research questions. Results are presented in Chapter IV, followed by conclusions and recommendations in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This study examined the relationship among parent involvement, stress, coping resources, race and family structure. The subjects were 53 parents whose children were enrolled in a large Virginia Headstart program during the 1987-1988 school year. To answer the six research questions which guided this study, assessment data related to the parents' involvement in Headstart, family stress level, and coping resources were analyzed.

Assessment of parent involvement was based on the parents' participation in the following Headstart activities: school programs, parent conferences, volunteering, parent meetings, and parent policy committees. Because the activities varied with respect to parents' roles, i.e., passive-active, weighted values (2-10), as shown in the continuum in Figure 1, were assigned to each of the categories. The extent of parents' input and control (passive-active) in parent activities were the major criteria used to weight the five different parent involvement categories.

The parents' stress level was determined by using the Family Inventory of Life Changes and Events (FILE). The FILE, consisting of 71 items, assessed stress along nine dimensions--intra-family, marital, pregnancy and childbearing, financial and business strains, work-family

Passive Active  $\longleftrightarrow$

Field Trips	Long-Term Goals	Housekeeping Tasks			
Picnics	Short-Term Goals	Clerical	Regional	Administrative Duties	
Child Performances	Individual Education Programs	Child Interactions Reading Cooking	Area Local	Decisionmaking Leadership	
Graduations					
Holiday Parties					
<hr/>					
School Programs 2	Parent Conferences 4	Classroom Volunteering 6	Parent Meetings 8	Policy Committees 10	

Figure 1. Parent Involvement Continuum

transitions, illness and family "care," losses, transitions "in and out," and legal. The Family Crisis Orientation Personal Evaluation Scales (F-Copes), comprised of 30 items was used to assess family resources along five dimensions-- social supports, reframing, spiritual support, community resources, and passive appraisal.

The first two sections of this chapter contain a discussion of the response rate and a description of the subjects. The remaining sections provide the results of the data analyses for each research questions.

### Response Rate

A random sample of 100 parents was selected for this study. This sample was drawn from 615 parents whose children were enrolled in the Headstart program during the 1987-1988 school year. Attrition reduced this sample to 53. As shown in Table 1, 21 percent of the parents in the original sample did not have the English proficiency to complete the inventories, 20 percent had moved out of the county, and 6 percent, due to a late school opening, had been involved in Headstart for less than two months (other parents had been involved for nine months). Therefore, a non-response bias is possible.

Table 1  
Response Rate of Subjects

Subjects	Number	Percentages
Sample Size	100	100
Respondents	53	53
Non-Respondents	47	47
Non-English Speaking	20	20
Moved	21	21
New to Program	6	6

### Description of the Subjects

The 53 parents used in this study were all low-income parents, as defined by federal/local guidelines. As shown in Table 2, 39 percent of the sample were black, 16 percent Hispanic, and 43 percent were white. With respect to family structure--one and two-parent families--66 percent were single parents and 33 percent were married parents. Finally, 45 percent of the parents were employed either part time or full time and 54 percent were unemployed.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between stress and parent involvement?

There is a negative correlation between stress and parent involvement. As family stress increases, parent involvement decreases. The frequency of parent involvement is dependent to some degree on the types of activities parents engage in. School programs and classroom volunteering provide numerous opportunities for participation, whereas parent conferences, parent meetings, and policy committees offer only limited opportunities for involvement. Parent meetings and policy committees are held once a month; in-school parent conferences are scheduled once a year. The possible participation opportunities, actual participation, and weighted scores reported in Table 3



Table 2  
Demographic Profile of Subjects

Demographic Data	Number	Percentage
Number of Parents	53	100
Racial Composition		
Black	21	40
Hispanic	9	17
White	23	43
Family Structure		
One-parent	35	66
Two-Parent	18	34
Employment Status		
Employed	24	45
Unemployed	29	55
Age of Parents		
20-25	18	34
25-30	24	45
30-35	11	21

Table 3  
Weighted Scores for Parent Involvement

Category	Opportunities for Participation	Actual Participation	Weighted Scores
School Pr.	371	114 (31%)	228
Parent C.	53	44 (83%)	176
Class. V.	7500	88 (1%)	528
Parent M.	457	80 (18%)	640
Policy C.	457	7 (2%)	70

reflect those differences in opportunities so that comparisons can be made between the various categories.

During the 1987-1988 school year, parent conferences (83%), by far, were the most frequently attended and classroom volunteering (10%) and policy committees (2%) were the least frequently attended. School programs (31%) and parent meetings (18%) reflected moderate attendance, with school programs being attended almost twice as much as parent meetings.

The stress measure contains nine subscales. These subscales tapped information related to the following stresses and strains within the family: intra-family, marital, pregnancy and childbearing, business and financial, work-family, illness and family care, losses, transition "in and out," and legal. By choosing yes or no, respondents indicated which of the 71 potentially stressful life events on the different subscales pertained to them.

Table 4 shows the percentage of responses for each stress subscale. These responses fell within three categories. Marital (43%), intra-family (36%), and work-family (36%) strain were the most frequently reported stressful events for this sample. Losses (19%), family care (18%), legal (17%), pregnancy (16%), and business and finance (14%) were the next most frequently reported and transitions (9%) the least frequently reported event.

Table 4  
Percentages for Stress Subscales

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Subscale	Percentages
Marital	.43
Intra-Family	.35
Work-Family	.26
Losses	.19
Family Care	.18
Legal	.17
Pregnancy	.16
Bus. & Finance	.14
Transitions	.09

---

The matrix in Table 5 shows a moderate negative correlation ( $r=-.52$ ) between parent involvement and stress. Table 6 shows the extent of the relationship between stress and parent involvement. When parent involvement was regressed on stress, an  $R^2$  of .27 was produced. Hence, 27 percent of the variability in parent involvement can be accounted for by variability in stress.

Table 7 provides comparative data for the stress measure. Examination of these data show that the Headstart sample had a higher mean, standard deviation, and range on the stress measure than the national sample. The national sample was large (2,895) and was by and large composed of white, middle-class professionals.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between resources and parent involvement?

Resources are positively correlated with parent involvement. Parents with higher resources are more involved in school activities. The resource measure (F-Copes) assessed to what degree respondents depended on the following coping resources: social support (relatives, friends, neighbors); reframing (redefining a problem to make it more manageable); community support (public assistance); spiritual support (dependence on religion/supreme being); and passive appraisal (taking a "wait and see" approach).

Table 5

## Intercorrelations Among the Six Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Parent Inv.	1.000					
2. Resources	.36*					
3. Stress	-.52*	-.56*				
4. Race 1	-.11	.07	.13			
5. Race 2	.06	.04	-.02	-.36**		
6. Fam. St.	.04	.06	-.19	.17*	.52	1.000

\*p .001 (two-tailed)

\*\*p .005 (two-tailed)

Table 6

## Multiple Regression Analysis of Variance for Stress and Resources

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	DF	Sum. Sq.	M. Sq.	F-Ratio	P Value
1. Parent Involvement	Stress	.27	-.52	1	18,795.55	18,795.55	19.17	.00*
	Resources			51	49,997.43	980.34		
2. Parent Involvement	Stress	.13	.36	1	9,323.69	9,323.69	8.60	.01**
	Resources			51				
3. Parent Involvement	Stress	.28	.10	2	19,325.34	9,662.67	9.77	.03**
	Resources		-.46	50	49,467.64	989.35		

N = 53

\*P &lt; .01

\*\*P &lt; .05

Table 7  
Comparative Data for Stress Measure

Population	Mean	SD	Range
Headstart (N=53)	16.9	9.8	168
National Sam. (N=2895)	9.21	5.6	34



A total score and subscale score were computed for the resource measure. The means and standard deviations for these scores are reported in Table 8. The average score for resources was 89.7 and the standard deviation was 24.2, indicating that there was considerable variation in the group's resource capabilities.

The means for the social supports (27.1) and reframing (29.2) subscales were twice as high as those for spiritual support (12.7), community support (12.1), and passive appraisal (12.6). These large differences are due by and large to the variation in the number of questions for each subscale. There were 8 and 9 questions respectively for the three other scales. Because of the variance in the number of questions, a non-parametric test (Kruskal-Wallis) was used to test the significance of the means. This test revealed no statistically significant differences among the means.

Respondents were asked to use the following Likert-type scale to describe their use of the five coping resources tapped by the subscales: (1) strongly disagree; (2) moderately disagree; (3) neither agree nor disagree; (4) moderately agree; and (5) strongly agree.

Percentages for each of the subscales were calculated to determine if respondents agreed, disagreed or were neutral regarding their dependence on the five support systems.

Table 8  
Means and Standard Deviations for  
Resource Measure

Measures	Means	SD
Resource Scale	89.7	24.2
Resource Subscales		
Social Sup.	27.1	7.0
Reframing	29.2	7.6
Spiritual Sup.	12.7	5.1
Community Sup.	12.1	4.5
Passive App.	12.6	2.8

As shown in Table 9, the highest percentage of disagreement was for social supports (46% = 29% + 17%). This is an indication that respondents do not generally acquire support from relatives, friends, neighbors and extended family. The highest percentage of agreement, was for reframing (58% = 28% + 30%). That is, respondents indicated that they redefined stressful events in order to make them more manageable.

For passive appraisal there was almost equal agreement (44% = 11% + 33%) and disagreement (43% = 21% + 22%). On the other hand, a much higher percentage of agreement, as opposed to disagreement, was reported for spiritual (44% = 15% + 29% for agree and 34% = 10% + 24% for disagree) and community (46% = 21% + 25% for agree and 32% = 23% + 9% for disagree) support. In addition, between 10 and 23 percent of the respondents were neutral about their use of the five coping resources.

The matrix in Table 5 shows a positive ( $r=.36$ ) correlation between resources and parent involvement. The  $R^2$  in Table 6 shows the extent of this relationship. When parent involvement was regressed on resources, 13 percent of the variability in parent involvement was accounted for by variability in resources. Resources, however, explain only about half as much of the variability in parent involvement as does stress.

Table 9  
Percentages for Resources Subscale

Subscales	Percentages				
	Disagreement		Neutral	Agreement	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Social Sup.	29	(46)	17	21	(36) 15
Reframing	14	(26)	12	28	(58) 30
Passive App.	21	(43)	22	11	(44) 33
Spiritual	24	(34)	10	15	(44) 29
Community	23	(32)	9	21	(46) 25

- (1) Strongly disagree  
(2) Moderately disagree  
(3) Neither agree or disagree  
(4) Moderately agree  
(5) Strongly agree

Comparative data for each of the subscales is presented in Table 10. The norming sample was demographically different from the Headstart sample. Whereas the Headstart sample was composed of non-professionals, who were low-income and multi-racial, the norming sample was composed of white, middle-class professionals. Despite these differences, with the exception of the passive appraisal means (8.1-norming; 12.6-Headstart) and the spiritual support means (16.5-norming; 12.7-Headstart), there was less than a percentage difference in the means.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship among stress, resources and parent involvement?

Table 5 shows that stress and resources are negatively correlated with each other ( $r = -.56$ ) and that stress is negatively correlated with parent involvement ( $r = -.52$ ), while resources are positively correlated with parent involvement ( $r = .36$ ).

When parent involvement was regressed on both stress and resources, as shown in Table 6, the explanatory power of  $R^2$  was increased. This increase, however, was small (from .27 to .28). Despite the fact that by itself stress explains 27 percent of the variability in parent involvement and resources explain 13 percent, together they only explain 28

Table 10  
 Comparative Data for Headstart and Norming Sample  
 for Resource Measure

Subscales	Headstart		Norming	
	Means	SD	Means	SD
Social Sup.	27.1	7.0	27.8	6.5
Reframing	29.2	7.6	30.4	4.8
Spiritual	12.7	5.1	16.5	2.8
Community	12.1	4.5	12.6	3.3
Passive App.	12.6	2.8	8.1	3.0

percent. This relative low increase in  $R^2$  was probably due to the moderately high correlation between stress and resources.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 summarize the relationship among parent involvement, resources, and stress. The regression line in Figure 2 clearly shows that as resources increase so does parent involvement. The negative slopes in Figures 3 and 4 clearly illustrate the moderate negative relationship between stress and resources and between parent involvement and stress.

Research Question 4: What effect do (a) race and (b) family structure have on stress?

Race and family structure have no effect on stress. The means and standard deviations for stress by race and family structure are presented in Table 11. The means for all three racial groups are similar, suggesting that blacks (18.4), whites (15.8), and Hispanics (16.3) are homogeneous with respect to stress. Likewise, the means for one parent (18.2) and two-parent families (14.3) reflect homogeneity.

With respect to the relationship between stress and race, Table 5 shows that blacks (.13) had a higher stress level than whites and that Hispanics had a lower stress level than whites (-.02). For family structure, two-parent families have a lower stress level than one-parent families.

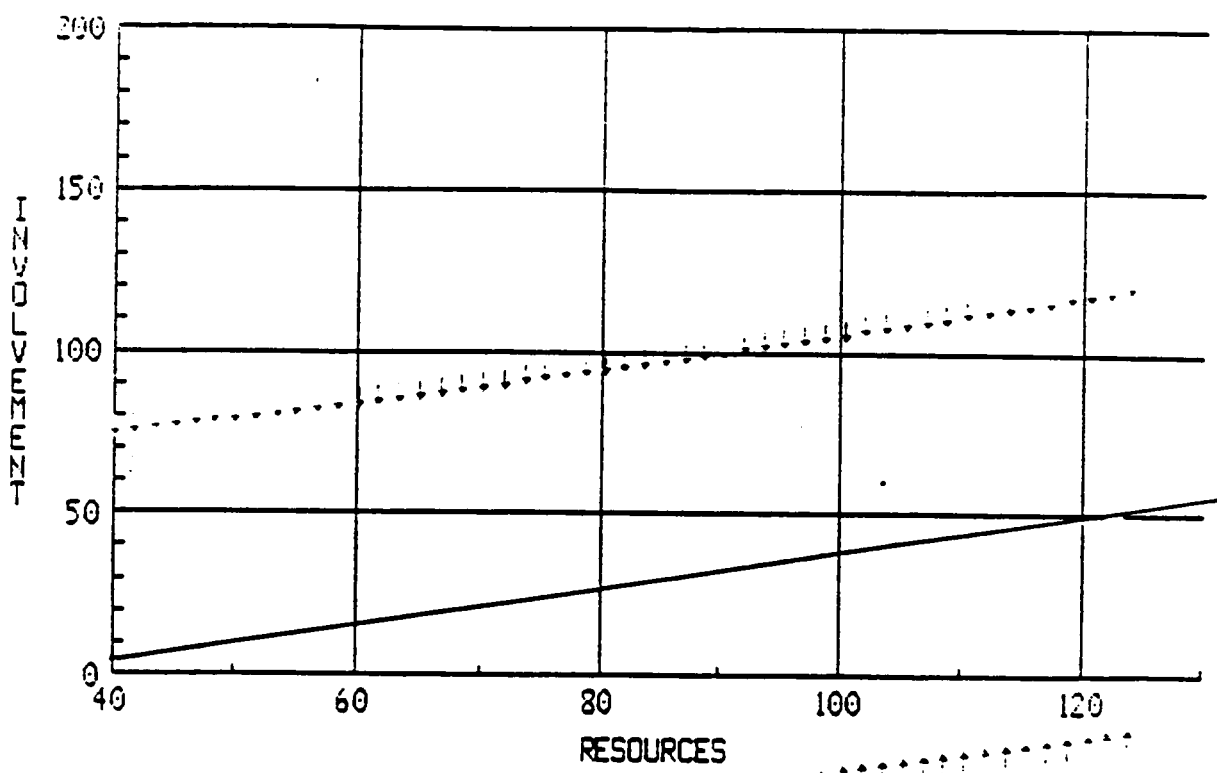


Figure 2. Involvement vs. Resources



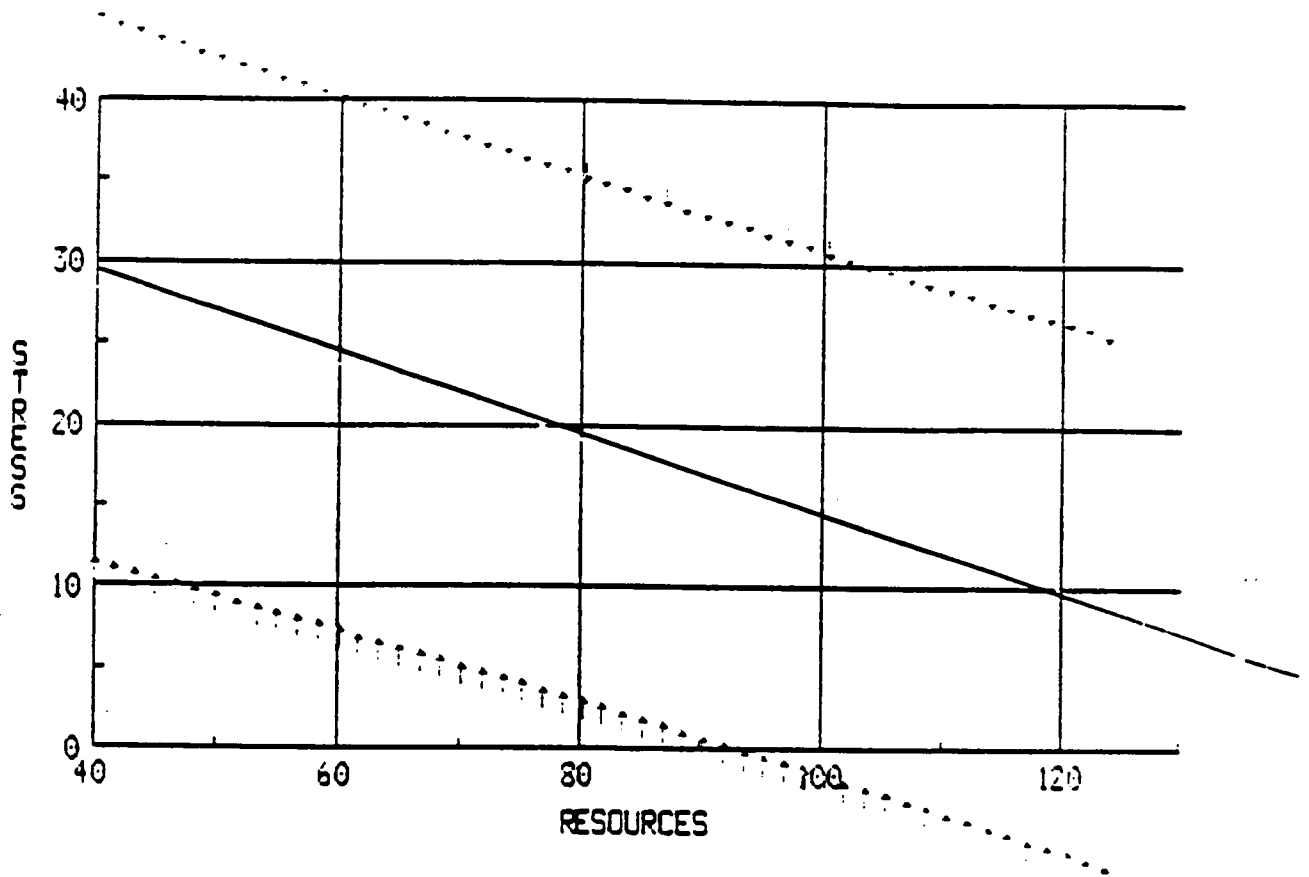


Figure 3. Stress vs. Resources

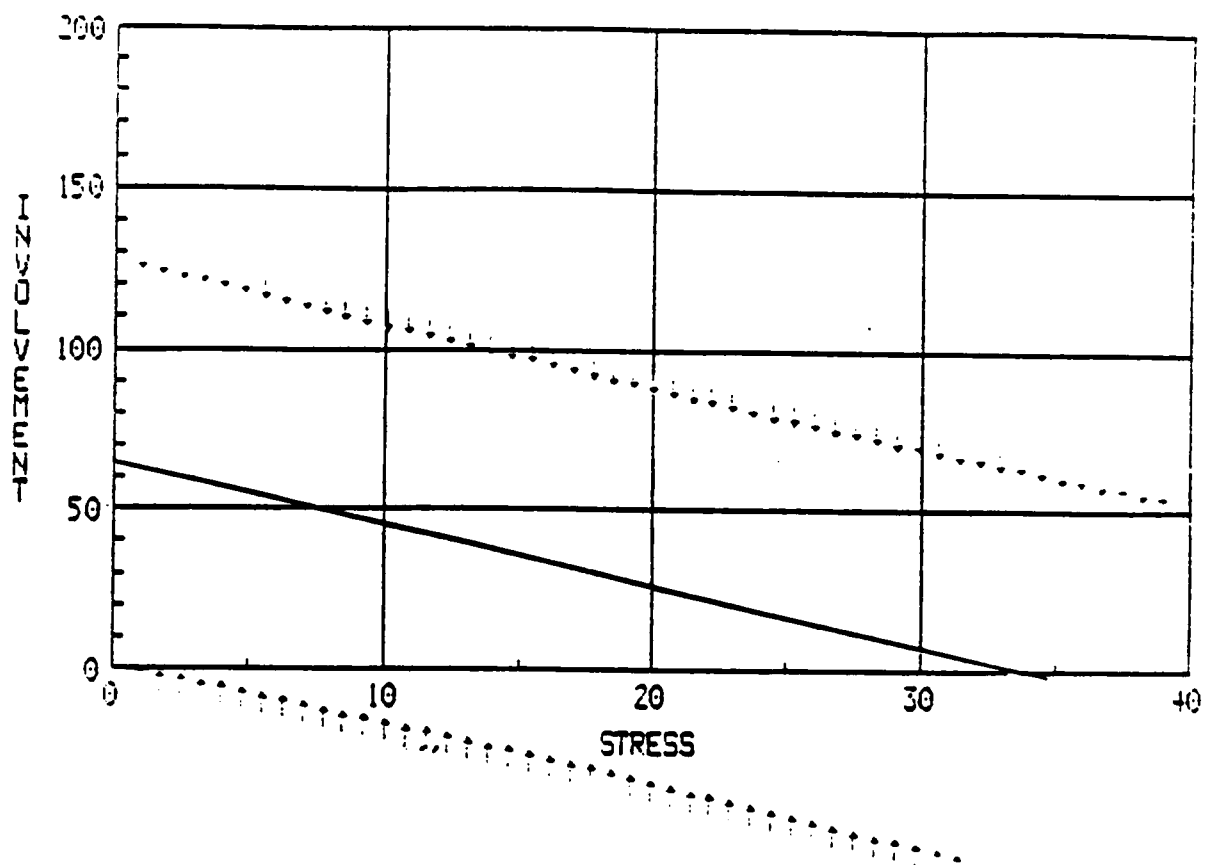


Figure 4. Involvement vs. Stress

Table 11  
Means and Standard Deviations for Stress  
by Race and Family Structure

Race/ Family Structure	N=53	Mean	Standard Dev.
Black	21	18.4	11.3
Hispanic	9	16.3	8.8
White	23	15.7	8.7
One-Par.	35	18.2	9.3
Two-Par.	18	14.3	10.3

These correlations, however, were low and not statistically significant.

The regression analyses in Table 12 shows a 1 percent change in  $R^2$  (from .27 to .28) when parent involvement was regressed on stress, race, and family structure. This small increase in  $R^2$ , is statistically significant but does not appreciably increase the explanatory power of  $R^2$ . Therefore, it can be concluded that race and family structure do not have an effect on stress.

Research Question 5: What effect to (a) race and (b) family structure have on coping resources?

Race has a small, but insignificant effect on resources; family structure, on the other hand, has no effect on resources. The means and standard deviations for resources by race and family structure are reported in Table 13. Blacks have the highest resource mean (91.8) followed by whites (88.6) and Hispanics (87.4). In looking at the resource means for one- and two-parent families, two-parent families (91) have a slightly higher mean than one-parent families (88). Analysis of variance showed no significant differences among these means.

Table 12

## Multiple Regression Analysis of Variance for Stress, Race and Family Structure

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	DF	Sum. Sq.	M. Sq.	F-Ratio	P Value
1. Parent Involvement	Stress	.27	-.52	1	18,795.55	18,795.55	19.17	.00*
				51	49,997.43	980.34		
2. Parent Involvement	Stress	.27	-.51	2	18,961.07	9,480.53	9.51	.00*
	Race 1 (Black)		-.04	50	49,831.91	996.64		
3. Parent Involvement	Stress	.27	-.52	2	18,987.30	9,493.65	9.53	.00*
	Race 2 (Hispanic)		.05	50	49,805.68	996.11		
4. Parent Involvement	Stress	.27	-.53	2	19,015.15	9,507.58	9.55	.00*
	Family Structure (Two-Parent)		-.05	50	49,777.83	995.56		
5. Parent Involvement	Stress	.28	-.53	4	19,178.23	4,929.56	4.82	.00*
	Race 1 (Black)		-.02	48	49,074.75	1,022.39		
	Race 2 (Hispanic)		.10					
	Family Structure (Two-Parent)		-.11					

N = 53

\*P &lt; .01

\*\*P &lt; .05

Table 13  
Means and Standard Deviations for Resources  
by Race and Family Structure

Race/ Family Structure	N=53	Mean	Standard Dev.
Black	21	91.8	25.7
Hispanic	9	87.4	23.8
White	23	88.6	23.8
One-Par.	35	88.5	25.3
Two-Par.	18	91.9	22.5

The correlations in Table 5 show, that when compared with whites, Hispanics have slightly lower resources (-.04) and blacks slightly higher resources (.07) than their white counterparts. With respect to family structure, the table shows that the resources for two-parent families are 6 percent higher than for one-parent families.

As indicated in Table 14, when Race 1 (black) and Race 2 (Hispanic) were combined with resources in the regression equation,  $R^2$  increased to 14 percent and 15 percent respectively. There was no increase in  $R^2$  for family structure. It can be concluded that race and family structure have little or no effect on resources.

Research Question 6: What is the relationship among (a) race; (b) family structure; and (c) parent involvement?

Race and family structure have no effect on parent involvement. The parent involvement means reported in Table 15 show that Hispanics (37.3) and whites (34.6) had a higher parent involvement mean than blacks (26.0).

When the means are looked at in relationship to family structure, it is apparent that there are minimal differences between one- and two-parent families with respect to parent involvement. As indicated in Table 13, the means for one- and two-parent families differed by only four points.

Table 14

## Multiple Regression Analysis for Resources, Race, and Family Structure

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	DF	Sum. Sq.	M. Sq.	F-Ratio	P Value
1. Parent Involvement	Resources	.13	.36	1	9,323.69	9,323.69	8.60	.01**
				51				
2. Parent Involvement	Resources	.15	.37	2	10,751.58	5,375.79	4.63	.01**
	Race 1 (Black)		-.14	50	58,041.40	1,160.83		
3. Parent Involvement	Resources	.14	.37	2	9,792.32	4,896.16	4.15	.02**
	Race 2 (Hispanic)		.08	50	59,000.66	1,180.01		
4. Parent Involvement	Resources	.13	.36	2	9,349.66	4,674.83	3.93	.03**
	Family Structure (Two-Parent)		.01	50	59,443.32	1,188.87		
5. Parent Involvement	Resources	.15	.38	4	10,871.23	2,717.81	2.25	.08
	Race 1 (Black)		-.13	48	57,921.75	1,206.70		
	Race 2 (Hispanic)		.05					
	Family Structure (Two-Parent)		-.03					

N = 53

\*P &lt; .01

\*\*P &lt; .05



Table 15

Means and Standard Deviations for Parent Involvement  
by Race and Family Structure

Race/ Family Structure	Mean	Standard Dev.
Black	26.8	38.7
Hispanic	37.3	34.0
White	34.7	35.9
One-Par.	30.8	39.1
Two-Par.	34.2	31.2

Table 5 shows that blacks are less involved (-.11) and Hispanics more involved (.06) in Headstart than whites. As to family structure, two-parent families (.04) were more involved than one-parent families. These correlations, however, are low and not statistically significant.

When parent involvement was regressed on Race 1 (black) and Race 2 (Hispanic) and family structure (two-parent), a .01  $R^2$  was produced as indicated in Table 16. Therefore, it can be concluded that race and family structure, have no effect on parent involvement.

### Chapter Summary

Stress and resources are two factors that effect parent involvement as evidenced by the results of the study. Stress and resources are negatively correlated with each other and have opposite effects on parent involvement. Stress is negatively correlated wit parent involvement and resources are positively correlated with parent involvement. Therefore, it is likely that (a) parents with a high family stress level will have low resources and be minimally involved in school activities or not at all; or (b) parents with a low family stress level will have high resources and will be involved in their children's education. Though race and family structure are components of stress and resources,

Table 16

Multiple Regression Analysis for Parent Involvement, Race, and Family Structure

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	DF	Sum. Sq.	M. Sq.	F-Ratio	P Value
1. Parent Involvement	Race 1 (Black)	.01	-.11	1	943.87	943.87	.71	.4083
				51	67,849.11	1,330.37		
2. Parent Involvement	Race 2 (Hispanic)	.00	.06	1	306.19	306.19	.23	.6399
				51	68,486.80	1,342.88		
3. Parent Involvement	Family Structure	.00	.04	1	132.33	132.33	.10	.7498
				51	68,660.65	1,346.29		
4. Parent Involvement	Race 1 (Black)	.01	-.10	3	1,000.04	333.35	.24	.8671
	Race 2 (Hispanic)			49	67,792.94	1,383.53		
	Family Structure		.01					

N = 53  
 \*P < .01  
 \*\*P < .05

they do not have a significant effect on parent involvement when socioeconomic status is not a variable.

Chapter V presents conclusions based on the summation of the resources along with recommendations and suggestions for further study.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Since the publication of A Nation at Risk, there has been an upsurge of interest in school reform across the country. Parent involvement has been cited as a key component in the current reform movement. It is generally agreed that involving parents in their children's education produces positive benefits. This idea is by no means new. In fact, the role of parents in the education process and their relationship with the school has, historically, generated conflict and debate. Over the years, the focus, vocabulary, and intensity of the debate have changed in response to the social and political tenor of the times. Yet, the issue of how to increase parent participation in the schools has persisted.

Despite the emphasis on, and generally agreed benefits of parental participation, in the past, little attention has been focused on identifying potential barriers to parental involvement. It has been only recently that researchers have begun to consider factors that might prevent parents from becoming involved in their children's education. A growing body of information (Stallworth, 1981; Stallworth, 1982; Williams, 1982; Stallworth and Williams, 1983) is now evolving on such topics as the attitudes of parents and educators toward involvement, the kinds of training parents

and educators need for successful involvement efforts, and the effect of social conditions on home-school relations. As researchers continue to search for underlying factors that inhibit parent involvement, educators and parents will gain greater insight into how a collegial or partnership relationship can be established, maintained, and perpetuated between home and school.

This study was undertaken to examine the relationship among family stress, resources, and parent involvement. In addition, race and family structure were examined to determine if they were components of stress that ultimately come to bear on parent involvement.

Information regarding the kinds of activities in which parents had participated during the year was obtained from parent involvement reports. The Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes (FILE) was used to assess the parents' family stress level and the Family Crisis Orientation Personal Scales (F-Copes) were used to determine the parents' family resource level. These data were analyzed to answer the research questions of the study.

In the first section of this chapter, each of the six research questions was answered by interpreting the results of the data analyses and drawing conclusions from these results. Presented in the last two sections are implications

for researchers and practitioners that stem from the data and recommendations for further study.

## Conclusions

### Stress and Parent Involvement

The findings show a negative relationship between stress and parent involvement. These findings support the ecological and stress paradigms, which were the theoretical underpinnings for the study.

The stress paradigm defines stress as a condition which exerts pressure on the "normal" or "regular" activities of individuals and subsequently on family systems. In looking at stress from an ecological perspective, it is obvious that the effects of stressful life events extend beyond the home setting. Family stress causes problems within the family and these problems affect interactions in external systems such as the school. Parents, therefore, who are encountering stressful life events are less likely to become involved in their children's education.

Stress accounted for 27 percent of the variation in parent involvement. In addition, the data indicated considerable variation in the kinds of activities parents participated in. Of the five different categories for parent involvement, classroom volunteering (1%) and parent committees (2%) were activities that parents were virtually

uninvolved in (1%). Parent meetings (18%) and school programs (31%) showed low to moderate involvement, whereas parent conferences (83%) showed a high degree of involvement. The nature of these activities and subsequently the parents' role in these activities sheds light on the differences in involvement.

By comparison, parents play a relatively passive role in school programs. Special occasions, such as holiday parties, picnics, graduations, field trips, and child performances are generally planned and directed by teachers. The parents on the other hand are the recipients of the action rather than active participants.

In looking at the degree of participation for higher level activities, Headstart parents tended to be far more involved in parent meetings than policy committees or classroom volunteering. It is speculated that parent meetings are more frequently attended because parents have an opportunity to work in their child's school with other parents that they know. Moreover, parent meetings provide opportunities for parents to take on leadership roles within the local school and to directly influence activities that impact on their children. Classroom volunteering does not afford such opportunities because parents are generally under the direction and supervision of the classroom teacher.



In contrast, to parent meetings, policy committees are usually composed of parents from area schools and decisions and actions made at this level must consider the needs and interests of all Headstart children. Understandably, many parents are more concerned about making a difference in the local school where their children attend rather than working cooperatively with parents from other areas.

Finally, parent conferences were the most frequently attended activity. Such high attendance is probably due to the fact that parent conferences provide individual time for the parent and teacher to discuss the child's progress. Also, parents have an opportunity at this time to provide direct input in their childrens' education by participating in the writing of IEPs (Individual Education Programs).

There were no data available to compare parent involvement in this Headstart program with other Headstarts or schools. The comparative data on stress, however, did show that the stress level of this Headstart group was higher than that of the national sample. It must be kept in mind, however, that racial, socioeconomic, education, and other variables prevent any valid conclusions from being drawn about these differences in stress levels.

### Resources and Parent Involvement

The data analyses showed that resources are positively correlated with stress. That is, increased parent involvement is a function of higher resources.

Resources and perception, are the second and third components of the stress paradigm. Resources refer to the family's capability for meeting the demands of stress and perception refers to how these demands are perceived, i.e., positively, negatively or indifferently.

The resource instrument (F-Copes) did not include a section on monetary resources. Socioeconomic status, however, was not a variable of interest. All parents were low-income as defined by local/federal guidelines. Social, community, spiritual and psychological (perception) resources were the dimensions tapped by this measure.

The social support subscale measured the family's ability to acquire support from relatives, friends, and neighbors. This subscale had the largest percentage of disagreement. That is, the majority of respondents indicated that they did not use this support system. It is speculated that this resource is used to a lesser degree because families are usually not in close proximity to their family of origin or extended family. Consequently, families are likely to receive only minimal support from relatives. In addition, as compared to earlier years, neighbors are not as

closely knit and supportive of each other. It is not uncommon for neighbors not to know or socialize with each other; therefore, it seems highly likely this would not be a source of support for families.

In contrast to social supports, reframing had the largest percentage of agreement. By and large respondents indicated that they put problems or stressful life events into perspective. In essence, they were more likely to perceive the glass as "half full" rather than "half empty."

Community support, as opposed to social support, received a higher percentage of agreement. Considering that 84 percent of the respondents were on ADC (Aid to Dependent Children), it is not surprising that the majority agreed that they used community resources as a source of support.

Interestingly, passive appraisal and spiritual support had identical responses for the agreement categories. For passive appraisal, it was almost an even distribution between agreement and disagreement. Half of the respondents reported that they took a "wait and see" approach to their problems, while the other half did not. With the exception of community support, spiritual support had the highest number of neutral responses. Nevertheless, the majority still indicated that they rely on religion as a means of support.

### Stress, Resources, and Parent Involvement

There is a negative correlation between stress and parent involvement and a positive relationship between resources and parent involvement. These two resources are negatively correlated with each other and affect parent involvement in opposite ways. Parents who have a high family stress level are likely to have a lower level of parent involvement. Conversely, parents that have high family coping resources are likely to have higher parent involvement.

These findings are consistent with the stress and ecological paradigms. Stress within the family prevents parents or other family members from establishing positive relationships with external social systems such as the school. When problems exist within the family, an inordinate amount of time and energy is spent in resolution of these problems, preventing parents and family members from devoting time and energy to extra-familial demands.

Sufficient coping resources, on the other hand, enable families to manage their problems and to form meaningful relationships with external social systems. Therefore, helping families find support systems to assist them with stressful life events increases the chances that parents will be able to function productively in the school setting and become involved in their children's education.

### Stress, Race and Family Structure

Race and family structure have no effect on stress, as evidenced by the results of the regression analysis. When race and family structure were combined with stress in the regression equation, there was only a marginal increase in  $R^2$ .

The means for the three racial groups did not vary substantially. Similarly, correlations between race and stress and family structure and stress were low and not statistically significant.

Race. Results from the data analysis are not consistent with studies (McAdoo, 1983; Gary, 1986) that show there is a relationship between race and stress. These studies provide convincing evidence that minorities--primarily blacks and Hispanics--experience differential treatment in America and this societal stressor places these families under tremendous pressure.

Denial of economic opportunities is a major stressor for minority families. Lack of economic opportunities manifests itself in inadequate education, job discrimination, and higher unemployment. Moreover, minorities are at greater risk for domestic breakup, maternal depression, poor health, recurrent financial crises, and disordered and uncontrollable life conditions.

Even though the data offer evidence that race is not related to stress, two questions should be considered. First, did the fact that all of the parents belonged to the same socioeconomic stratum neutralize race differences? In essence, were the stressful events in these parents' lives more a function of socioeconomic status than race? Second, were the items on the stress instrument too general to discern differences between the three racial subgroups?

In answer to the first question, it is conceivable that socioeconomic conditions are more related to stress than race. Race on the other hand becomes a factor in stress only when it does not afford a family the economic opportunities to become integrated into the mainstream of society.

The fact that all the parents in this group were economically disadvantaged, made them more alike than different. Their responses to the items were reflective of their socioeconomic status rather than their race.

As set forth in the stress paradigm, it is resources that make a difference in stress. Resources are a determinant of socioeconomic level; therefore, if resources are equal, race is not likely to make a difference in a family's stress level.

In response to the second question, it is generally agreed that measurement instruments, especially in the social sciences, have their shortcomings. These include criticisms

that they often do not include items that are appropriate for different populations (Brown, 1974). This may have been the case with the F-Copes. The items may be too general and consequently do not detect racial differences.

Family Structure. The research indicating the pervasive influence family structure has on families and individuals is voluminous. Relevant to this study is one conducted by Weinraub and Wolf (1983). This study looked at family structure as a variable in stress. Specifically, the researchers wished to determine if single parents face more stressful life events and changes and have fewer social supports and community ties than married parents.

Contrary to the findings of this study, the results showed that compared to married parents, single parents do face more stressful events and do not generally maintain productive relationships with external support systems. Of greater interest, however, is that the research found that single parents, despite the increased stresses, did not experience any more difficulty in coping with the stresses and responsibilities in their lives than married parents.

Here again, the issue of socioeconomic status comes into play. The subjects used in the Weinraub and Wolf study were from middle-class, educated families. Consequently, they had the economic resources to offset the demands placed on them by single parenting. Single-parenting across different

socioeconomic groups, as does race, might be more stressful when resources become a factor.

### Resources, Race and Family Structure

The results of the analysis indicate race and family structure have no effect on resources. Adding race and family structure to the regression equation increased  $R^2$  by only one percent, not enough to make a significant difference in the explanatory power of the coefficient.

Despite the results of the analysis, it is obvious in the world of reality that differences in resources make a difference in the quality of living. Resources--economic, family, community, psychological, spiritual--are mediators of stress and can counteract the stressful demands placed on individuals and families.

Race. Economic resources are inequitably distributed in this country. Not only is there a growing number of poor, but there also appears to be a strong relationship between race and poverty. There is a disproportionate number of blacks and Hispanics in the lower socioeconomic stratum of American society. These racial minorities, have fewer resources, and consequently encounter more stressful life events.

The resource instrument used in this study did not tap the families' economic resources. Items were confined to



family, community, spiritual, and psychological supports. Because the parents were homogeneous with respect to income, economic diversity was controlled. It is hypothesized that racial differences for parent involvement would have been apparent if the sample had included parents from middle and upper class socioeconomic levels.

Family Structure. As with race, family structure is correlated with resources. Single parents are likely to have fewer resources than two-parent families. Decreased financial resources in single-parent families because of a single, rather than dual income, places additional demands on these families, making them more vulnerable to stress. Disordered home life, task overload, and minimal or no social supports make the life of single parenting more challenging and difficult.

Resources, that is economic resources, are probably the single most important factor that can erase differences between single and two-parent families. Parents who have the financial means can purchase services such as quality child care, household help and affordable housing which single parents may not be able to afford.

#### Race, Family Structure, and Parent Involvement

The  $R^2$  in two different regression equations--parent involvement regressed on stress, race and family structure

and parent involvement regressed on resources, race, and family structure--showed no significant increase when race and family structure were added to the two equations. Race and family structure had no effect on either stress or resources and subsequently had no effect on parent involvement.

### Implications

Parent involvement has the potential for bonding two of the most vital institutions in American society--the school and home. Such bonding is necessary because as the complexity of American life continues to increase, it is imperative that the various social institutions which underpin American society work together harmoniously. Unity among these systems, not divisiveness, will help families withstand the pressures that characterize American life.

A partnership approach has been suggested by many educators (Rich, 1987; Henderson, 1987). Such an approach, asserts these educators, will allow parents and educators to combine their knowledge, skills, and experience to enhance educational efforts in homes as well as schools. Moreover, mutually supportive relations between school and home will ensure that children will achieve maximum benefit from schools and will be prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

Despite the positive outcomes of parent involvement, studies have generally shown that parents have very little involvement in the public schools. In an effort to capitalize upon the benefits of parent involvement, this topic has been widely discussed in professional journals of education and has become a major focus of the current reform movement.

Researchers and practitioners are ferreting out those factors that promote and impede parent participation in the schools. Their goal is to identify what works or does not work to raise the level of parent involvement.

The results from this study indicate that two interrelated factors--stress and resources--are contributing factors to parent involvement. The regression analysis showed that almost 30 percent of the variation in parent involvement was the result of stress and resources. This finding, as well as others that emerged, has definite implications for researchers and practitioners.

First, because family stress and resources determine a family's function within and outside the family, schools must identify those families that are overburdened with problems and provide direct/indirect support. Second, attention must be given to the diversity that exists within school populations and school programs modified to accommodate the unique needs and problems of various subgroups, i.e.,

single-parent families, impoverished families, dual-career families, and minorities. Third, schools must continuously evaluate parent programs, promoting only those that are most enriching, rewarding, and appropriate for parents. Finally, researchers and practitioners should continue to identify and examine those components of parent involvement that foster positive, and productive home-school relations.

Assessing Family Stress. Determining the stress level of families presents a challenge to educators. Nevertheless, if schools are to provide needed support, they must identify families' needs. Numerous instruments are available that can be used to gather information about the stress and resource level of families. Predictably, these instruments have their shortcomings. School personnel, therefore, must critically assess various instruments and then make a selection based on the specific needs of the populations they serve. Sometimes it will be necessary for school staff to modify and revise instruments or to develop their own instruments.

Because probing into the personal lives of families is intrusive and has numerous legal ramifications, school staff must identify strategies that will encourage families to seek assistance and to share information about themselves. Moreover, school staff must be committed to providing family support and must ensure that confidentiality is observed.

In some instances it will be necessary for schools to become liaison agencies, directing parents and families to services within the community. This may mean telephoning these services and acting as parent advocates. It may mean making follow-up calls to agencies and encouraging parents to follow through on getting assistance.

In some instances it may mean that the schools themselves must be the catalyst in setting up support groups within the school that will provide help for parents. For instance, it may mean bringing together a group of newly divorced parents and helping them work through the hardships of adapting to single parenthood.

In essence, the school's role must change in response to the pressing needs and demands that are causing pressure within the home and preventing parents and children from obtaining maximum benefit from the schools.

Schools of course will not be elated to assume greater responsibility. However, if consideration is given to the fact that a growing number of families are under stress and this stress can negatively impact on the next generation, how can the school and home not join forces to develop the human resources that are vital to the continued growth and productivity of this country?

Family Diversity. That parents are different is an important caveat that school staff should heed. First,

school staff must recognize that parents bring different skills, abilities, and resources to the school setting. Therefore, it may be necessary to provide support for some parents if they are to become active partners in their childrens' education.

Second, school staff must be willing to take on the responsibilities of assisting parents with their needs. That is, schools must do whatever possible to ensure that all children and parents will receive maximum benefit from the education system.

The Role of Researchers and Practitioners. A major objective of research is to develop sound and heuristic theories which can be tested empirically. The practitioner on the other hand, puts into practice those theories that have proven to be applicable in a given setting. Heretofore, little or no attention had been given to uncovering underlying factors that might prevent parents and educators from sharing mutually supporting roles in the education of children.

The home and school have traditionally blamed each other when children were not successful in school. More than ever it is clear that the reciprocal relationship between school and home precludes either of these institutions from accepting the blame for children's failure or underachievement in the school setting. How the children

perform in school is a function of both home and school factors.

When researchers look for obstacles of parent involvement, an in-depth examination of both home and school should be conducted. Then and only then will parents and educators gain insight into the interrelated factors and variables that prevent parents and educators from collaboratively working together to achieve education goals which will have a strong and positive impact on children's achievement inside and outside of the school setting.

The research is moving in this direction. Studies are emerging that are not only looking at the parent's role, but at the role of teachers, principals, administrators, policy makers, and teacher educators.

As this information becomes accessible, it is the practitioner's responsibility to critically review, cull, and select those parent involvement ideas that seem promising and have the potential for making a meaningful contribution to parent involvement efforts and programs.

Strategies must be developed that mesh with the needs and interest of the diverse populations schools serve. These strategies, if effective, will reflect hours of planning, organizing, decision-making, and compromising on the part of the key actors--parents and educators.

Historically, parents and educators have attempted to bridge the gap between school and home. The complexity of American society today and the changes that are coalescing on the horizon indicate that to continue to let a chasm separate home and school will threaten the very survival of these two major societal institutions. The time to take action is now and the individuals who must assume this responsibility are, undoubtedly, parents and educators.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

1. Motivation and attitudes are factors that influence behavior. A study should be conducted to determine the relationship between parental attitudes, motivation, and parent involvement.
2. Studies which focus on how the home influences the child's behavior in school have been voluminous. More research is needed to determine how the school influences the home. For example, do certain parent education programs change the quality of life in the home and influence behavior over an extended period of time?
3. Teacher behavior is a critical factor in home-school relations. According to some educators, teachers often do not have the knowledge or skills needed to strengthen home-school relations.



Therefore, teacher training and education need to become primary components of in-service programs. In addition, evaluation studies should be conducted periodically to assess how effective this training is in increasing parent involvement.

4. The number of working mothers of school-aged children is increasing. It seems that traditional parent involvement activities--classroom volunteering, programs during school hours, etc.--have to be modified to accommodate parents' schedules. Research should be undertaken to determine how employment, especially dual careers, effect parent involvement and whether or not existing parent involvement programs meet the needs of contemporary families.
5. Low-income families, in particular, are dependent to a great extent on external sources for meeting many of their basic survival needs. It is recommended that studies be conducted to determine to what extent community agencies are supportive of these families.

In conclusion, this study was undertaken to examine the relationship among stress, resources, and parent involvement, as well as to determine if race and family structure were components of stress and resources that also

influenced parent involvement. The findings showed that stress has a negative effect on parent involvement and resources have a positive effect. Further, race and family structure were not related to parent involvement for this group of parents.

These findings give support to the ecological and stress paradigms and reinforce the need for researchers and practitioners to continue to search for underlying factors that hinder home-school relationships in general and parent involvement specifically.

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APPENDIX A  
LETTER OF PERMISSION

The letter of permission from the Chairman of the Research Screening Committee of a Virginia Public School System, who granted approval to conduct the study.

January 25, 1989

Ms. Brenda W. Jones

Dear Ms. Jones:

We are pleased to inform you that your application to study the relationship between parent involvement and stress in a group of Headstart parents has been approved by the Research Screening Committee of the Fairfax County Public Schools, pending return of the attached form. Specific conditions of this approval are attached. Please sign the agreement and send it to me. Final approval of your research is contingent upon receipt of the agreement.

Please review Regulation 3910 (attached) and adhere to it carefully. If you plan to make changes in the study, please contact me. If I can be of further assistance, please call me at 698-0400, extension 8706.

Once you have completed your project, please send me an abstract and two bound copies of the study so that one can be placed in the Professional Library at Fairfax High School and one in our office. We look forward to reviewing the final project.

Sincerely,

CC/bjw  
Attachment

cc:

APPENDIX B  
LETTERS OF PERMISSION

Letters of permission from Dr. Hamilton McCubbin, Dean of School of Family Resources and Consumer Sciences, at University of Wisconsin--Madison, to use the FILE and F-Copes Inventories in the study.



**SCHOOL OF FAMILY RESOURCES AND CONSUMER SCIENCES**  
 University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1300 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706 608-262-4847

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

December , 1988

Brenda Jones

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am pleased to give you my permission to use the **FILE: Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes** and **FIRM: Family Inventory of Resources for Management** instruments. We have a policy to charge \$5.00 (one time charge only) *per instrument* to individuals who seek permission. We apologize for this necessity.

The manual, **Family Assessment Inventories for Research and Practice**, should be cited when using the instruments. The publication was printed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1987 and edited by Hamilton L. McCubbin and Anne L. Thompson.

Also enclosed are 5 copies of the **FILE** and **FIRM** instruments. Additional copies can be obtained at this address for 10 cents each. When large quantities are requested, the cost of postage is also added to the order.

If I could be of any further assistance to you, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Hamilton L. McCubbin  
 Dean

HIM/cjd

Enclosures



SCHOOL OF FAMILY RESOURCES AND CONSUMER SCIENCES  
 University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1300 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706 608-262-4847

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

December 20, 1988

Brenda W. Jones

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am pleased to give you my permission to use the F-COPES: Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales instrument. We have a policy to charge \$5.00 (one time charge only) *per instrument* to individuals who seek permission. We apologize for this necessity.

The manual, *Family Assessment Inventories for Research and Practice*, should be cited when using this instrument. The publication was printed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1987 and edited by Hamilton I. McCubbin and Anne L. Thompson.

Also enclosed are 30 copies of the F-COPES and the FILE: Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes instruments. Please contact our office if you need additional copies of any of the instruments.

If I could be of any further assistance to you, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Hamilton I. McCubbin  
 Dean

HIM/cjd

Enclosures



APPENDIX C  
PARENT CONSENT FORM

Consent form from Headstart parents in a  
Virginia Public School System to participate in  
study.

February 6, 1989

Dear

I am compiling a handbook of support services for Headstart parents and would appreciate your help. You can help by answering the questions on the two enclosed inventories.

If you agree to assist with this project, your inventories will not be identified by name and all information will remain strictly confidential.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to fill out the two inventories—FILE (Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes) and F-Copes (Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales).

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not wish to fill out the two inventories.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Brenda W. Jones  
Education Coordinator

Encls.

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