



Teen Mothers as a Target Group for Prevention Services

Janna B. Oetting, Sonja L. Pruitt, Shannon L. Farho
Louisiana State University



ABSTRACT

In this study, we examined the knowledge and skills of low-income and under-educated caregivers, many of whom were teens when they had their first child. Compared to previous work with low-income mothers, the caregivers studied here were less facilitative even though they rated their abilities at levels that were comparable to mothers who were older and had more education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teen mothers are not a random sample of the population; they frequently carry with them a host of other characteristics that make parenting difficult. Teen mothers often have limited educational experiences, finances, parenting knowledge, and cognitive readiness to raise a child (Black & Tedi, 1997; Camp, 1995; Hoffman, 1998; Sommer et al., 1993; Whitman, Borkowski, Schellenback, & Nath, 1987). Teen mothers are also less responsive and less likely to provide positive affect, object labels, and utterances within periods of joint attention to their infants when compared to older and/or more educated mothers (Barratt & Roach, 1995; Coll, Hoffman & Oh, 1987; Culp, Appelbaum, Osofsky & Levy, 1988; Culp, Culp, Osofsky & Osofsky, 1991; Culp, Osofsky & O'Brien, 1996). Consistent with these findings, the children of teen mothers often encounter more developmental problems and have more delayed communication skills at the preschool level when compared to the children of non-teens (Brooks-Gunn & Furstenburg, 1986; Oppel & Royston, 1971; Roosa, Fitzgerald, & Carson, 1982).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. At what level do the mothers rate their knowledge of child speech and language development and their skills in facilitating their children's speech and language development?
2. How do the mothers interact with their children when playing and reading books?

PARTICIPANTS

Seventeen caregiver-child dyads participated. All of the caregivers were African American, poor, and working on their GED; 13 were teens when they had their first child. All of the children were developing language typically; they ranged in age from 24 to 62 months.

#	Mom's Age	Mom's Educ.	Financial Aide	No. of Children	HOME Total %	HOME Quartile	Child's Age	Child's Gender	Birth Order
1	18	9	WIC	1	76	Mid	24	female	1
2	18	9	Food Stamps	1	56	Low	25	male	1
3	21	10	WIC	2	67	Mid	36	female	1
4	17	9	Medicaid, WIC	2	76	Mid	38	female	1
5	30	9	Food Stamps	2	69	Mid	37	female	2
6	19	8	WIC, Medicaid	1	53	Low	46	male	1
7	23	8	WIC, Food Stamps	2	51	Low	48	female	1
8	21	11	Food Stamps, WIC	2	76	Mid	67	male	1
9	26	11	Food Stamps	2	63	Mid	37	female	2
10	24	11	WIC, Food Stamps	5	77	Mid	30	female	4
11	24	10	Food Stamps	4	55	Mid	58	female	2
12	22	11	WIC, Food Stamps	2	56	Mid	48	male	1
13	30	11	Food Stamps	4	60	Mid	43	female	4
14	26	10	WIC, Food Stamps	5	80	Mid	30	male	5
15	24	8	WIC, Food Stamps	3	60	Mid	45	female	1
16	19	9	WIC	2	55	Mid	46	male	1
17	24	11	Food Stamps	1	62	Mid	62	female	1
M	22.88	9.71	N/A	N/A	64.24%	N/A	42.24	N/A	N/A
SD	(4.05)	(1.16)			(9.71)		(12.09)		

CAREGIVER QUESTIONNAIRE

A 30-item questionnaire was created to examine the participants' self-ratings of their knowledge and skills. As can be seen, ratings were highest for knowledge and skills involving play and daily activities. Overall ratings were consistent with those of older and more educated mothers.

	No/Never Yes/Always 5
Basic	
I am familiar with speech and language developmental milestones.	3.31 (1.82)
I know what articulation is.	1.37 (1.88)
I know what disfluent speech is and examples of the types.	1.25 (1.73)
I know some behaviors that negatively affect a child's voice.	3.31 (1.08)
I know what happens to a child's hearing when he/she has an ear infection.	3.25 (2.11)
Mean (SD)	2.50 (1.11)
Play	
I know how to help children learn to talk when playing with toys.	4.19 (1.38)
When I play with toys with a child, I talk about what I am doing with the toy.	4.37 (.81)
I know the difference between perceptual and functional play.	1.75 (1.77)
I understand the different levels of play.	3.56 (1.75)
I know how to follow a child's lead during play.	4.31 (.79)
Mean (SD)	3.64 (.88)
Reading	
I am familiar with the different levels of reading.	4.25 (1.29)
I know what print awareness means.	1.25 (1.77)
I know how to scaffold a child's language during book reading.	2.62 (1.50)
When reading with a child, I use props in the book.	2.38 (2.03)
When reading with a child, I say more about the page than the printed words.	4.00 (1.10)
Mean (SD)	2.90 (.86)
Daily Activities	
I can think of 3 things that I can talk about when I am feeding a child.	4.37 (.81)
I can think of 3 things that I can talk about when I am dressing a child.	4.56 (.63)
I can think of 3 things that I can talk about when driving in a car with my child.	4.50 (.73)
When a child asks me a question, I answer right away, even if I am busy.	3.94 (.85)
When I work around the house with my child, I talk about what I am doing.	4.00 (1.41)
Mean (SD)	4.28 (.68)
Mean for Total Speech and Language Items	3.33 (.79)
Comparison Sample of 212 Older and More Educated Caregivers	3.48 (.64)

LANGUAGE SAMPLES

Each play session lasted 30 minutes (range = 24.67 to 32.85 minutes). Prompts included small plastic food items, a picnic table, two books, a baby doll, two bottles, a wash cloth, powder, a garage and gas station set, two cars, and six small people. A total of 8,061 utterances were collected from the caregivers; 7,450 were transcribed as complete and intelligible. As can be seen, there was variability in the caregivers' behaviors, but overall they were less talkative and used more non-facilitative behaviors than other low-income mothers that have been studied.

#	Number of utterances per minute	MLU	Word types in 100 utterances	Word tokens in 100 utterances	Facilitative behaviors		Non-facilitative behaviors	
					Percent of utterances with pre-literacy content	Percent of utterances with an affirmative	Percent of utterances with a prohibition	Percent of utterances with a directive
1	18.15	4.11	145	421	27		2	36
2	16.77	4.50	96	423	34	1	2	43
3	16.14	4.77	113	390	8	6	4	24
4	9.47	3.53	78	303	0	12	1	21
5	15.20	4.25	113	401	5	7	2	11
6	17.02	4.93	136	442	4	1	3	27
7	8.94	4.60	123	391	15	3	3	31
8	17.88	4.68	160	497	12	2	2	20
9	9.83	4.66	125	428	0	4	8	17
10	15.43	4.63	117	437	14	4	9	24
11	19.91	5.74	192	552	11	3	5	39
12	11.95	4.72	173	456	25	10	8	9
13	20.16	5.02	112	379	30	4	4	38
14	14.52	4.53	133	379	13	3	7	21
15	11.33	5.47	146	490	20	3	5	17
16	11.42	4.44	124	392	17	10	5	24
17	11.71	4.65	156	452	37	5	12	16
M	14.46	4.66	131.76	425.47	16	5	5	25
SD	(3.65)	(.49)	(28.35)	(56.37)	(11)	(.03)	(3)	(10)

DISCUSSION

The mothers studied here rated their knowledge and skills at levels that were comparable to older and more educated mothers. Nevertheless, they were less facilitative than other low-income mothers who have been studied by previous researchers. The implications of these findings are two-fold. They highlight the need for SLP professionals to participate in community-based general education/prevention services. They also highlight the need for these services to include low-income and under-educated caregivers.

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