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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT AND PROBLEMS OF LATENCY-AGE CHILDREN
REFERRED TO A CHILD GUIDANCE CLINIC

By ~~XXXX~~

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research in the effects of maternal employment on children indicates there is a tendency for boys in latency to show more emotional disturbances than girls of the same age (Hand, 1957). Other studies (Siegel et al., 1959; Rouman, 1956; Hoffman, 1961) have shown that these disturbances manifest themselves in withdrawn behavior more than in aggressive, acting-out behavior.

Latency-age boys comprise the largest single group of children referred to child guidance clinics because of emotional disturbances. If the research findings stated above are valid, then one might expect a male child guidance clinic population of this age to have a significantly higher proportion of mothers who are employed than the latency-age female population. In addition, it might be expected that the referral problems of boys with working mothers would be more for reasons of withdrawal than for aggressive behavior.

The purpose of the present study was to re-examine the cited research findings through the use of a child guidance clinic population to determine if more boys than girls in latency with working mothers are referred to clinics, and whether the referral problems of these boys

substantiate the research findings regarding the incidence of withdrawn behavior. No statistics regarding the referral problems of girls were found in the literature, perhaps indicating that there have been no significant findings. This factor was included in the present study in order to determine if any significant relationship exists.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

On the basis of the cited research findings, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- I. Latency-age boys referred to a child guidance clinic have a higher proportion of working mothers than girls of the same age referred to a clinic.
- II. Boys with working mothers are referred more for withdrawn behavior than for aggressive behavior.

Definitions

Latency is generally accepted as that stage of development between the approximate ages of 7 and 11. Nine and ten year olds were selected as representative of that range.

Emotional disturbances are defined for this study as any problems which result in a child being referred a child guidance clinic and accepted by the clinic as being in need of services.

Maternal employment is defined as either full or part-time employment of the mother outside of the home at the time of referral.

Referral problems are those which are presented by the family during the initial interview. "Withdrawn

behavior" includes the presented problems of chronic unhappiness, prepsychotic symptoms, withdrawal, day-dreaming, depression, fears, anxiety, inferiority, poor social adjustment, nervousness, hyperactivity. "Aggressive behavior" includes anti-social behavior, truancy, stealing, defiance, running away, temper tantrums, cruelty, over-aggressiveness, sex offenses, fire setting. The preceding categories were adapted from a list formerly used by the Lansing, Michigan, Child Guidance Clinic.

Sample

Data for this study was collected from case record information provided by the Lansing, Michigan, Child Guidance Clinic. All cases referred in 1963 and 1964 were considered. The sample was then restricted to children living with at least one natural or adoptive parent, eliminating those in foster homes and institutions. 123 boys and 39 girls were used in the study.

Statistical Tests

Chi-square was the statistical test used with the level of significance established at the $p = .05$ level.

RESULTS

The number of boys with working mothers remained relatively constant over the two year period, constituting about one-fifth of the total referrals both years. In 1963, one-fourth of the total girls referred had working mothers and in 1964 over half of the total girls referred had mothers who were employed. These results showed a highly significant difference (Table 2) in the opposite direction of the hypothesis.

The referral problems were also tested in relation to working mothers. There were no significant differences when each year was analyzed individually. The total number showed a significant relationship between boys with working mothers and withdrawn behavior (Table 2), supporting the hypothesis that boys with working mothers are referred more for problems of withdrawal than for aggressive, acting-out behavior. There was no significant relationship between maternal employment and the referral problems of girls.

TABLE 2
RESULTS OF χ^2 TESTS

Comparison	χ^2	p
Boys and Girls Referred in 1963 with Working and with Non-Working Mothers	.03	> .05
Boys and Girls Referred in 1964 with Working and with Non-Working Mothers	10.45	< .001
Total Boys and Girls with Working and with Non-Working Mothers	6.19	< .05
Total Aggressive and Withdrawn Boys with Working and with Non-Working Mothers	4.48	< .05
Total Aggressive and Withdrawn Girls with Working and with Non-Working Mothers	.47	> .05

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that latency-age girls may be more adversely affected by their mothers' working than boys of this age. The nature of this effect did not show any significant pattern regarding the referral problems, however, while the problems manifested by the boys of working mothers did show a significant degree of problems of "withdrawal", supporting previous research findings.

While the presence of maternal employment per se may or may not be a significant cause of disturbance in children, the fact that over half of the girls referred in one year had working mothers may indicate that there is some relationship between maternal employment and emotional disturbances. This may be due in part to the less availability of the mother to the girl as an identification model, the mothers' attitudes towards working and her sexual role, and the consequent attitudes of the girl in relation to her feminine role. It might be expected that when the mother is employed, the daughter may be expected to assume more responsibility in the home, particularly if she is the oldest child. In an examination of the sibling structure of referred children, it was found that less than half of the girls

with working mothers were the only or oldest girl in the family, while 17 of the 21 boys were the oldest or only boy in the family. It might be assumed from this that the oldest girl might tend to internalize her maternal duties in a positive way. The oldest boy, however, is not in a position to adjust in this manner; in addition, being the oldest boy he may be fulfilling another role, particularly as a substitute husband to a neurotic mother.

Of the total sample of 162 children, it was interesting to note that only three of these children were only children; all three of these were boys. The average number of children in the families of the girls was four; the average number for the boys was slightly less than this.

During the collection of data for this study, it was noted that information regarding the presence of maternal employment was not always indicated on the face sheet, but was often mentioned only perfunctorily in the narrative material. One might conclude from this that social workers do not consider this information very significant in establishing an initial diagnosis of a case.

IMPLICATIONS

Because the results of this study drastically differ from other research regarding the effects of maternal employment on children, the implications for further needed research are evident. There is an increasing amount of research being conducted in the effects of maternal employment on children but, as evidenced in the present study, results are often inconclusive or contradictory.

Because of the high percentage of latency-age girls who have mothers employed outside of the home, this would appear to be an area where greater emphasis should be laid in the casework process. In addition, the fact that such a high percentage of the referred girls had working mothers yet manifested no pattern in the referral problems indicates a need for deeper research into this area.

The significant relationship between boys with working mothers and problems of withdrawal may serve as meaningful material in the casework process.

Factors not taken into account in this study which may have provided clearer answers are the length of employment prior to the time of referral, family attitudes toward this employment, and the reason for employment.

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