

ASSESSMENT OF PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAM

by

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has been approved

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ASSESSMENT OF A PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAM

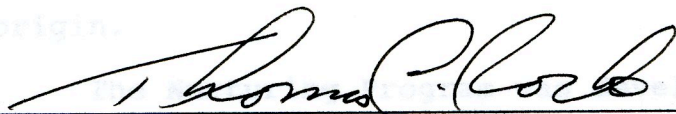
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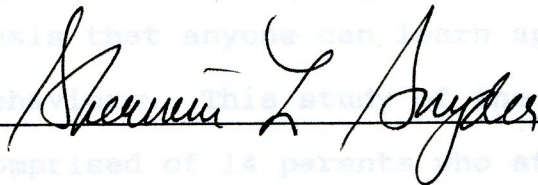
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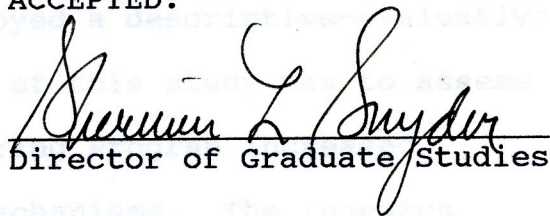
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APPROVED:





ACCEPTED:



Director of Graduate Studies

Within the past ten years, the role of parents has been viewed with increasing importance due to the growing number of children being abused by their parents. The effects of maltreatment are viewed in the countless number of children experiencing varying degrees of emotional, behavioral, and learning disorders. The impact of maltreatment is often continued throughout life when learned abusive parenting behaviors are repeated in future generations of children within the same family. One major difference between parents called abusive and those called nurturing is the type and quality of training received in the family of origin. Data needs to be gathered from a variety of

The Nurturing Program was developed on the theoretical basis that anyone can learn appropriate child rearing behaviors. This study of the Nurturing Program was comprised of 14 parents who attended a minimum of 10 out of 12 sessions. This study employed a descriptive-evaluative research design. The purpose of this study was to assess the degree to which the Nurturing Program increased parenting skills and coping mechanisms. The research question asked, "To what degree does The Nurturing Program presented by Parents Anonymous at Sunnyslope Elementary School on February 24 to May 19, 1994, increase parenting skills and coping mechanisms of the adults who participated in the program?"

The literature showed that over 1,000,000 children are abused and neglected each year and between 2,000 and 5,000 children die each year due to physical abuse and neglect. Therefore, this study was completed in an attempt to determine if the Nurturing Program is effective in retraining parents. The instruments used for collecting the data consisted of the Attitude Inventory and the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios. The results of the study indicate that the Nurturing Program seems to be effective in increasing parenting skills and coping mechanisms in the adults who participated in the program. However, further research needs to be done to determine if attitudes reported on the instruments convert to changes in behavior for the parents. Data needs to be gathered from a variety of sources rather than relying solely on self-reporting instruments.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to those who have been victims of poor parenting; that they may find the strength and wisdom to develop their own parenting skills in the next generation, thus stopping the cycle of neglect and abuse.

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THE PROBLEM

Introduction to the Study

This research study is designed to measure the degree to which the Nurturing Program presented by Parents Anonymous at Sunnyslope Elementary School on February 24 to May 19, 1994, increased parenting skills and coping mechanisms. The Nurturing Program was developed with the intent of changing dysfunctional and abusive parenting behaviors. "The goals, objectives, and activities which constitute the Nurturing Program were formulated from the known parenting and child rearing patterns of parents identified as having physically abused, emotionally abused, and neglected their children" (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985, p.5).

Background of the Study

In the past, societies have depended upon reproducing their orderly forms of family life by rearing children who will regard the way they were raised as normal and desirable. Of all the roles designated as critical for the development of a healthy society, the most important are those which surround the role of the parents in the child rearing process (Bavolek and Comstock, 1984). To offset the generational perpetuation of dysfunctional parenting practices, schooling in appropriate

parenting and child rearing is viewed as the single most important treatment and intervention strategy. Parents must be re-taught new patterns of parenting to replace old, abusive behaviors. But years and years of experience with abusive interactions make changing those behaviors a difficult task. Change is threatening and difficult for many abusive parents (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

Change involves substituting known behaviors, ideas, morals, and knowledge for new ways. The way one acts toward children and other adults is directly related to self-perception and the extent of one's self-awareness. Changing child rearing behaviors also involves changing the self. Since self and behavior are one, to change means to change both, and that is where the challenge exists (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

The Nurturing Program is a parenting skills program in which the whole family participates and learns new ways of behaving. Parents and children meet in separate groups and engage in activities designed to: increase self-awareness, develop better communication skills, teach behavior management skills, and promote an understanding of developmental abilities of children. The program is designed so that every participant will develop new knowledge and skills and experience positive healthy human interactions (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

The authors of the Nurturing Program, Dr. Stephen Bavolek of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and Christine Comstock of Parents Anonymous of Ohio, conducted extensive clinical research to validate this approach to breaking the cycle of inappropriate parenting. They developed instruction in appropriate parenting based on known parenting behaviors of abusive parents: Inappropriate Parental Expectations of the Child, Parental Lack of Empathic Awareness of the Child's Needs, Parental Value of Physical Punishment, and Parent-Child Role Reversals (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

Purpose of the Study

Hitting children for any reason is abusive and is a learned behavior. In order to offset abusive parenting practices which have been passed from generation to generation, appropriate parenting skills need to be acquired and maintained. Therefore, the goal of the Nurturing Program is to increase the nurturing and parenting skills of parents who are experiencing interaction problems with their children. The purpose of this study is to assess the degree to which the Nurturing Program presented by Parents Anonymous at Sunnyslope Elementary School increases parenting skills and coping mechanisms.

Research Question

To what degree does the Nurturing Program presented by Parents Anonymous at Sunnyslope Elementary School on

February 24 to May 19, 1994, increase parenting skills and coping mechanisms of the adults who participated in the program?

Theoretical Basis for the Study

There are many formative influences that shape adult attitudes and behavior in regard to parenting children: parents, peers, religious beliefs, ethnic practices, socio-economic status, television, books, and school. Of all the influences mentioned above, parents are the single most powerful determining influence of them all. The majority of the early years are spent experiencing, witnessing, and modeling the interaction patterns between the parents and other members of the immediate family. It is during these early years that the influence of parenting styles has the greatest developmental impact upon the children (Bavolek and Comstock, 1984).

The Nurturing Program was developed on the theoretical basis that anyone can learn appropriate, as well as, inappropriate parenting and child rearing behaviors. One major difference between parents called abusive and those called nurturing is the type and quality of training received in the family of origin. Of all the roles designated as critical for the development of a healthy society, the most important are those which surround the role of parents in the child rearing process (Bavolek and Comstock, 1984).

Within the past ten years, the role of parents has been viewed with increasing importance due to the growing number of children being abused by their parents. The effects of maltreatment are viewed in the countless number of children experiencing varying degrees of emotional, behavioral, and learning disorders. "The impact of mistreatment is often continued throughout life when learned abusive parenting behaviors are replicated in future generations of children within the same family" (Bavolek and Comstock, p. 2, 1984).

Significance of the Study

Parents Anonymous of Arizona is a statewide non-profit organization. The purpose of this organization is to provide a continuum of services that strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. Parents who participate in the Nurturing Program are referred to Parents Anonymous by a variety of community sources such as: child protective services, the medical, legal and mental health systems, as well as schools, media, family, and friends. The results of this study may be beneficial to Parents Anonymous as documentation that the Nurturing Program is effective in developing parenting skills and coping mechanisms in the adults who participate in the program.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarification within this study, the following child abuse and neglect terms are defined:

emotional abuse: a chronic pattern of behavior,

such as belittling, humiliating, and ridiculing a child (Gallmeier and Bonner, 1991, p. 8)

emotional neglect: the consistent failure of a parent or caretaker to provide a child with appropriate support, attention, and affection (Gallmeier and Bonner, 1991, p. 8)

failure to thrive: a condition in which children show a marked retardation or cessation of growth; on a normal growth chart, FTT children usually fall below the 3rd percentile of the normal growth curve (Gallmeier and Bonner, 1991, p. 11)

neglect: the chronic failure of a parent or caretaker to provide a child under 18 with adequate food, clothing, medical care, protection, and supervision (Gallmeier and Bonner, 1991, p. 10)

physical abuse: any non-accidental injury to a child under 18 by a parent or caretaker: injuries may include beatings, shakings, burns, human bites, strangulations, or immersion in scalding water, with resulting bruises and welts, broken bones, scars, or internal injuries (Gallmeier and Bonner, 1991, p. 14)

sexual abuse: the exploitation of a child or adolescent for the sexual gratification of another person: behaviors such as intercourse, sodomy, oral-genital stimulation, exhibitionism, voyeurism, fondling, and involving a child in prostitution or the production or pornography (Gallmeier and Bonner, 1991, p. 16)

shaken infant syndrome: occurs when adults, frustrated and angry with small children, shake them strenuously: this may cause brain damage and bleeding on the surface of the brain (Gallmeier and Bonner, 1991, p. 11)

Assumptions of the Research

This study is based on parental self-reporting. The results of the Attitude Inventory and the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios are based on the parent's ability to

accurately report their level of parenting skills and coping mechanisms.

Self-report inventories are especially subject to malingering or faking. Despite introductory statements to the contrary, most items on such inventories have one answer that is recognizable as socially more desirable or acceptable than the others. On such tests, respondents may be motivated to "fake good," or choose answers that create a favorable impression, as when applying for a job or seeking admission to an educational institution. Under other circumstances, respondents may be motivated to "fake bad," thus making themselves appear more psychologically disturbed than they are. This may occur, for example in the testing of persons on trial for a criminal offense (Anastasi, 1988, p. 549).

Two assumptions are applicable to this study. The first assumption is that the participants answered honestly on the Attitude Inventories and the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios. The second assumption is that the participants have the ability to accurately report their level of parenting skills and coping mechanisms.

Limitations of the Research Study

The number of parents attending the Nurturing Program at Sunnyslope Elementary School on February 24 to May 19, 1994, was 25. Parents Anonymous requested that parents make a commitment to attend a minimum of 10 of the 12 classes. However, as the study progressed some families attended sporadically. This sporadic attendance resulted in missed opportunities to increase parenting skills.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter two will review pertinent literature and focus on child abuse, the constructs of abusive parents, and parenting skills taught in the Nurturing Program. Chapter three will describe the methodology used, the design of the study, sample and population, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. The findings of the study will be presented and the data will be analyzed in chapter four. Chapter five will consist of the summary which will provide an overview of the entire study. Conclusions and recommendations will also be discussed along with suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature on child abuse focuses primarily on emotional, physical, and sexual maltreatment of children under the age of eighteen. The following review includes an overview of the work of the authors of the Nurturing Program, Stephen Bavolek, Ph.D., and Christine Comstock. The research review of the literature is presented in three areas: Child Abuse, The Constructs of Abusive Parents, and Parenting Skills Taught in the Nurturing Program.

Child Abuse

Child abuse is defined as when a parent or caretaker inflicts or allows the infliction of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect or abandonment of a child (Gallmeier and Bonner, 1991). The problem of child abuse in the United States of America appears to be pervasive. It has been estimated that:

- * over 1,000,000 children are abused and neglected each year
- * between 2,000 and 5,000 children die each year due to physical abuse or neglect, that is one child every four hours
- * the average age of fatalities from child abuse is two and a half years
- * an abused child returned to parents without intervention has a 35% chance of being seriously reinjured, 1.7% of the children are killed

* one child in five will be sexually abused by the age of eighteen

* 80-90% of sex offenders are known to the child or adolescent victim

*over one third of child sexual abuse involves children five years old or younger (Gallmeier and Bonner, 1991, p. 1)

Child maltreatment, as it is defined today, was at one time permissible behavior. Before the 1800's children were brought into the world to serve and carry on the family line. The fate of the child depended entirely upon the needs of the parents. Historically, children could be killed by their parents until they were granted the right to live, usually through a type of ritual. Getting rid of unwanted infants was not an uncommon practice and was considered socially acceptable. This kind of family structure was conducive to maltreatment (Radbill, 1980).

Even after children were granted the right to live, there was no guarantee that they would be appropriately cared for. Children had very little use until they were old enough to help their parents with the household chores. Children who were handicapped were more likely to be abused or neglected because they were less likely to help with the family (Radbill, 1980).

Parental rights were considered so fundamental that contemporary action on behalf of abused children was taken initially through the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, because no organization existed which directed

its activities toward the protection of children (Radbill, 1974).

Abuse-prone parents tend to have many similar behavioral characteristics that are recognizable if examined closely. For example, Wolfe (1987) found that parents who tend to abuse have low-frustration tolerance, inappropriate expression of anger, social isolation, impaired parenting skills, unrealistic expectations of children, and a sense of incompetence in parenting. It is not unusual for these individuals to have few close friends and little contact with other family members and to have no affiliation with church, school, or social organizations (Basset, 1974).

Parental beliefs about training children represent conceptions of desirable actions for themselves as well as their children. Harm may come to children when their parents are misinformed about the parameters of socially acceptable child rearing practices. For example, parents who have learned that severe physical punishment teaches children to behave will be more likely to use such punishment on a regular basis. Showers and Bandman (1986) found that the majority of perpetrators in 78 cases referred for physical abuse with electric cords viewed discipline of this kind as appropriate. This was attributed to sociocultural differences in perceptions of appropriate discipline.

abusing parents treat their children like young adults, and had trouble understanding various stages of

Hart and Brassard (1987) suggested that child-rearing beliefs, values, and practices are products of one's own personality and upbringing. One basic theme is repeated over and over in the literature: that the individuals who maltreat their children are only acting in the same manner as had their parents (Bavolek and Comstock, 1984).

The Constructs of Abusive Parents

As Bavolek and Comstock (1985) pointed out, "A parenting and nurturing program designed to change dysfunctional and abusive parenting behaviors must be developed from a sound theoretical basis" (p. 5). The target behaviors and objectives of the instruction must be directly related. "To change abusive parenting patterns, an understanding of what constitutes abusive behavior is required. The known parenting behaviors of abusive parents serve as the basis from which program development and instruction in appropriate parenting emanates" (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985, p. 5).

The following are the four constructs of abusive parents:

1. Inappropriate Parental Expectations of the Child:

Starting in the earliest stages of a child's life, abusing parents seem to be unable to accurately relate to the skills and abilities of their children. Galdston (1965) found that abusing parents treat their children like young adults, and had trouble understanding various stages of

child development. In these misconceptions, the child is expected to act in a way that is beyond his or her developmental stage. These misconceptions come from a lack of knowledge and understanding in regard to a child's developmental stages. Martin (1976) found that when children are treated as though they are older, they are often expected to shoulder a great deal of the household responsibilities (Steele and Pollock, 1968; cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

Martin (1976) states that when children find their parent's expectations impossible to meet, the children begin to feel like worthless failures (cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

2. Parental Lack of Empathic Awareness of the Child's Needs

Another shared trait of abusive parents is their inability to understand the needs of their child and to respond to those needs in appropriate ways. Not only do abusive parents have a disregard for their child's needs, but they also have high expectations for their performance (Steele, 1975). Melnick and Hurley (1969), in their study of personality variables of abusing parents, found mothers to have extremely frustrated dependency needs and an inability to be empathetic with their children (cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

The effects of inadequate empathic parental care during the early years of an infant's and child's life are profound

and lasting (Steele, 1975). A child whose basic needs are neglected fails to develop a sense of trust in people (Martin, 1976). A child whose parents pay little or no attention to him or her, where she or he is not permitted to make demands on the parents, and to be obedient, provides little or no basis for learning right from wrong. As a result, the child fails to develop confidence in his or herself and in his or her basic abilities (Steele, 1975; cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

Acting his or her age usually means doing as he or she is told by the parents, and does not mean testing reality. Violence, cruelty, and causing pain to others are not considered unusual to the child. The parent with whom the child identifies, models violent, cruel, and physically or psychologically abusive behaviors under the idea of teaching, helping, and controlling the child. The results of this behavior are the child's low sense of self-esteem and a distorted sense of guilt (Steele and Pollock, 1968; cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

3. Parental Value of Physical Punishment:

Abusive parents may believe babies should not be allowed to "get away with anything"; they must from time to time be shown "who is boss" and to respect authority so they will not become sassy or stubborn (Steele, 1975). Wasserman (1967) found that abusive parents not only considered physical punishment a proper disciplinary measure, but

strongly believe that it is their right to use physical force (cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

Physical attacks by the abusing parents are often not an impulsive discharge of aggression by the parent onto the child. On the contrary, studies appear to indicate that abusive parents use physical punishment as a means of behavior management designed to punish and correct conduct or inadequacy on the part of the child (Davoren, 1975). Much of what the abusive parent finds wrong in his or her children are the same things for which he or she was criticized and punished as a child, so the abusive parent often feels a sense of righteousness by following family traditions (Steele, 1975; cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

4. Parent-Child Role Reversal:

Ackley (1977), and Martin (1976), have noted a fourth common parenting behavior among those that abuse, role reversal. The child lives in an environment in which he or she is expected to be responsible for much of the happiness of the parents, where role reversal exists. Essentially, the parent acts like a helpless, needy child looking to his or her child as if the child could provide parental care and comfort (Steele, 1975). Ackley (1977) states that potential abusers both seek and shun intimate adult relationships. On one hand, potential abusers seek intimacy because it was

missing in their earlier parental relationship (cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

This leads them to define a close relationship as one in which, like a child, they can: (1) obtain emotional support and warmth without giving much in return, and (2) depend on their partner to solve the problems of living that adults are called upon to solve. Alternately, intimacy is shunned because the first childhood attempts were such failures. It is these initial failures that now lead the adult to believe that close relationships are dangerous and doomed to produce disappointment and threats of self-esteem because people cannot be trusted (Ackley, 1977; cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985, p. 8).

Ackley (1977) further states that the behavioral result of this complex set of feelings is that the potential abuser marries an individual who is not able to provide the emotional support needed. Potential abusers then, unsurprisingly, find their marriages deeply disappointing because the marriages do not provide the desired emotional support (cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

The next step is to have children; the expectation being that, with children, the parent will finally have someone who loves them unconditionally. They soon find that early parenting involves giving, not taking, and as a result experience only more disappointment. "They see their children as 'inadequate' and in their irritation beat, chastise, belittle, or ignore their children. The effects of the role reversal phenomenon upon the abused child further reinforce his or her feelings of inadequacy" (cited in Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

Parenting Skills Taught in the Nurturing Program

Based on the constructs of inappropriate parenting discussed above: Inappropriate Parental Expectations of the Child, Parental Lack of Empathic Awareness of the Child's Needs, Parental Value of Physical Punishment, and Parent-Child Role Reversal affective and cognitive goals have been identified which form the basis for the development of the Nurturing Program activities. (Comstock, 1985, p. 8-10).

To remediate inappropriate parenting, parents and children must re-experience positive interactions. This is accomplished by involving family members in activities which elicit affect (emotions), as well as cognition (knowledge). Through this approach, new behavior patterns are more likely to be recalled and maintained (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985).

Cognitive Goals of Parenting Skills

A. Developmental Expectations:

Parents will increase their knowledge of age appropriate developmental capabilities and needs of children.

B. Empathy:

Parents will increase their ability to communicate their needs.

C. Behavior Management:

Parents will increase their knowledge of appropriate methods of behavior management.

D. Self Awareness:

Parents will increase their knowledge of their own needs.

Affective Goals of Parenting Skills

A. Developmental Expectation:

Parents will increase their awareness of the negative impact inappropriate expectations have upon self-concept.

B. Empathy:
Parents will demonstrate an ability to become empathically aware of the needs of children.

C. Behavior Management:
Parents will value the use of appropriate methods of behavior management.

D. Self-Awareness:
Parents will accept their own strengths and limitations (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985, p. 8-10).

The Nurturing Program (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985) is designed for children and their parents for 12 weeks, one day a week, for 2 1/2 hours sessions. Both children and parents are involved in separate programs meeting at the same time. The programs are conducted by professionals and paraprofessionals from all walks of life. The parents are asked to attend the program for 12 sessions. Entire family units are requested to attend. Single parents are asked to bring their significant other with them to the program. Weekly sessions are presented with goals, objectives, and procedures for each program activity.

Filmstrips and audio-cassettes have been developed to teach parents new behavior management skills. Children ages 4-7 and 8-12 work together in groups to develop new skills. Separate activities manuals have been developed for both the parent's program and the children's program.

Summary

"Dysfunctional parenting and interactions are learned, and can be substituted with healthy, nurturing parent-child interactions. Parenting, whether appropriate or inappropriate, is a process; a way two human beings interact with each other" (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985, p. 11). What separates those parents classified as abusive from those classified as non-abusive is a matter of degree as well as frequency of appropriate skills. and coping mechanisms of the program participants.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to assess the degree to which the Nurturing Program presented by Parents Anonymous at Sunnyslope Elementary School on February 24 to May 19, 1994, increased parenting skills and coping mechanisms of the program participants.

Identification of Research Methodology Used

This study employed a descriptive-evaluative research design. The purpose of descriptive research is to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest (Simpson and Merriam, 1984). "Evaluative research collects data or evidence on the worth or value of a program, process, or technique. Its main purpose is to establish a basis for decision making" (Simpson and Merriam, 1984, p. 7). A descriptive-evaluative design combines aspects of both approaches.

Description of the Methodology

This study consisted of an Attitude Inventory (see Appendix A), a cover letter (see Appendix B), and the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios (see Appendix C). These instruments were used as diagnostic tools to determine the degree to which the Nurturing Program increased parenting skills and coping mechanisms of the adults who participated

in the program. The Attitude Inventory and the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios were designed based on the goals, objectives and activities of the program. These instruments were designed to measure the progress or changing attitudes of the adult participants regarding their own parenting skills and coping mechanisms over the course of the 12 week program.

Sample and Population

The sample selected for this study was comprised of 25 individual parents who attended the Nurturing Program presented by Parents Anonymous at Sunnyslope Elementary School on February 24 to May 19, 1994. Participants were asked to complete an Attitude Inventory on weeks 2, 6, and 11 of the program. The participants were asked to complete the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios on week 10 of the program. Confidentiality was maintained in that all information that was analyzed was reported throughout as group data only.

It was necessary to identify which parents had attended a minimum of 10 classes out of the 12 offered by Parents Anonymous. These parents received a certificate of completion for the program.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used for collecting the data: an Attitude Inventory (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985) (see Appendix A) and the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios (see

Appendix C). The scenarios were researcher designed. The Attitude Inventory is a unidimensional instrument that allowed participants to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with a statement regarding their own parenting skills. This inventory was administered at three intervals during the Nurturing Program: weeks 2, 6, and 11. The Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios were eight situations based on the known parenting and child rearing patterns of parents identified as having physically abused, emotionally abused, or neglected their children. These patterns are: Inappropriate Parental Expectations of the Child, Parental Lack of Empathic Awareness of the Child's Needs, Parental Value of Physical Punishment, and Parent-Child Role Reversals (Bavolek and Comstock, 1984). The scenarios each included a statement based on the patterns of abusive parents and participants were to identify how strongly they felt about the parent and child interaction on a 5 point scale ranging from "strongly agree" (scored 1), "agree" (scored 2), "not sure" (scored 3), "disagree" (scored 4), and "strongly disagree" (scored 5).

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected by means of the self-administered Attitude Inventory on weeks 2, 6, and 11, and the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios were administered on week 10 of the Nurturing Program. The responses were analyzed as group data and identities of the subjects remained confidential.

Ten minutes were provided to complete the inventories and scenarios during class time. The eight scenarios were researcher designed and tested in a pilot study using graduate research students. Ten minutes were provided for a class of graduate students to complete the scenarios. The responses were analyzed as group data and identities of the students remained confidential. Also included is Appendix D which is an evaluation of the Parents Anonymous Nurturing Program for 8 - 12 year olds and Appendix E which is a case study. sed of 25 individual parents. However as the study

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to assess to what degree the Nurturing Program presented by Parents Anonymous at Sunnyslope School on February 24 to May 19, 1994, increased parenting skills and coping mechanisms of the adult participants in the program.

The original sample selected for this study was comprised of 25 individual parents. However as the study progressed, 11 of these parents attended the Nurturing Program sporadically. These 11 parents failed to complete the program by attending a minimum of 10 out of the 12 sessions. As a result, the sample selected for this study changed to 14 individual parents. These 14 parents received a certificate of completion for the Nurturing Program from Parents Anonymous. The increase in parenting skills and coping mechanisms were measured by the Attitude Inventory (Appendix A). The Attitude Inventory was administered by the facilitator of the Nurturing Program on weeks 2, 6, and 11 of the program.

The Attitude Inventory consists of 8 items designed by S. Bavolek, Ph.D., and C. Comstock, authors of the Nurturing Program. The Attitude Inventory was adapted with permission from the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory and is based on the four constructs of abusive parenting: Inappropriate

Parental Expectations of the Child, Parental Lack of Empathic Awareness of the Child's Needs, Parental Value of Physical Punishment, and Parent-Child Role Reversal.

The researcher began analyzing the data by compiling the sum of the items on each Attitude Inventory to obtain an overall score. These total scores were computed by summing the scores on all the individual items with the highest possible score of 40 and the lowest possible score of 8 (see Figure 1). The individual items #2, 3, 5, 6, and 7, and the Attitude Inventory were scored as follows: "strongly agree" (scored 1), "agree" (scored 2), "uncertain" (scored 3), "disagree" (scored 4), and "strongly disagree" (scored 5). The individual items #1, 4, and 8, on the Attitude Inventory were scored as follows: "strongly agree" (scored 5), "agree" (scored 4), "uncertain" (scored 3), "disagree" (scored 2), and "strongly disagree" (scored 1).

Figure #1
Attitude Inventory Scores

Parent	Week 2	Week 6	Week 11	Growth
A.	32	38	absent	*
B.	28	31	28	0
C.	40	absent	40	*
D.	40	40	40	0
E.	30	absent	25	*
F.	29	17	19	+2
G.	36	39	35	-1
H.	27	33	34	+7
I.	32	37	40	+8
J.	27	29	38	+11
K.	22	absent	23	*
L.	34	33	32	-1
M.	25	24	absent	*
N.	34	27	38	+11

* - denotes incomplete information

The growth score was computed by taking the lowest total score from either week 2 or week 6 and subtracting it from the score from week 11, according to the test scoring instructions. For example, parent "H" received a score of 27 for week 2, and a score of 33 for week 6, and a score of 34 for week 11. The lower of the first two scores was 27, while the final score was 34. The difference of these two numbers is 7. Thus, parent "H" scored a +7 in growth. In the event only two scores were recorded, a symbol (*) for insufficient data was recorded.

At the beginning of this parenting program there were 25 parents enrolled. Out of those 25 parents, 9 (36%) attended less than the 10 sessions required to receive a certificate of completion from Parents Anonymous. However, 14 (56%) completed the program by attending the required number of sessions. Of the 14 parents completing the program, 9 (64.2%) completed the Attitude Inventory on weeks 2, 6, and 11 of the program. Of the 9 parents with 3 test scores, 5 (55.5%) showed a positive increase in parenting skills and coping mechanisms, according to their Attitude Inventory scores. Also, of the 9 parents with 3 test scores, 2 (22.2%) received a slightly negative score (-1), and 2 (22.2%) remained stable. However, one of the parents that remained stable earned a perfect score of 40 on all 3 tests.

According to the total scores of these 9 parents, the greatest growth (+17) occurred in the construct on corporal punishment. These parents increased their knowledge of alternatives to physical punishment or force that are reflected in item numbers:

4. Children seldom learn good behavior through the use of physical punishment.
8. Children are less likely to learn appropriate behavior when they are spanked for misbehaving.

Furthermore, the composite scores of these 9 parents show a significant growth (+14) in the construct on inappropriate expectations. These parents increased their knowledge of parental expectations based on their responses to item numbers:

1. It is unreasonable to expect children under three years of age to take care of themselves.
5. Parents should expect their children to grow emotionally at about the same rate.

Also, the composite scores of these 9 parents reflect a growth (+9) in the construct on empathy. These parents increased their knowledge of empathic statements based on their responses to item numbers:

3. Parents who are sensitive to their children's feelings and moods often spoil their children.
7. Parents who encourage communication with their children only end up listening to complaints.

The least growth (+2) was shown by these parents in the construct of role reversal based on their responses to item numbers:

2. Children should be the main source of comfort and care for their parents.

6. Young children should try to make their parent's life more pleasurable.

Figure 2
Attitude Inventory Growth Scores

Parent	Inappropriate Expectations	Empathy	Corporal Punishment	Role Reversal
B.	-1	+1	-1	-2
D.	0	0	0	0
F.	0	+4	+1	-3
G.	+1	-1	-2	-1
H.	+5	-1	+3	0
I.	0	+3	+5	+3
J.	+4	+3	+4	+2
L.	-1	-1	0	0
N.	+5	+1	+7	+3
Composite Scores	+14	+9	+17	+2

The second instrument designed to measure parenting skills and coping mechanisms was the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios. It was completed during class by the parents on week 10. This instrument was researcher designed and pilot tested in a graduate research class. The Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios consists of 8 scenarios based on the four constructs of abusive parenting: Inappropriate Expectations of the Child (scenario #2 and 5), Parental Lack of Empathic Awareness of the Child's Needs (scenario #1 and 6), Parental Value of Physical Punishment (scenario #3 and 7), and Parent-Child Role Reversal (scenario #4 and 8).

The researcher began analyzing the data selected through this instrument by summing the scores on all the items on each of the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios

completed by parents who received a completion certificate for the Nurturing Program from Parents Anonymous. These scores were computed as follows: "strongly agree" (scored 1), "agree" (scored 2), "not sure" (scored 3), "disagree" (scored 4), and "strongly disagree" (scored 5). The highest possible score was 40 and the lowest possible score was 8 per person.

Figure #3 represents the composite scores for the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios for the 14 parents chosen for this study by attending a minimum of 10 out of the 12 classes of the Nurturing Program. Each of the four constructs was examined on two scenarios on the instrument.

The construct of corporal punishment was presented in scenarios #3 and 7. According to the composite scores of these 14 parents, the greatest number of points (123) were recorded reflecting their knowledge of alternatives to physical punishment or force in disciplining children based on their responses to item numbers:

3. When children are spanked for misbehaving they are more likely to learn appropriate behavior.

7. Children should be slapped by their parents when they have done something seriously wrong.

The construct of empathy was presented in scenarios #1 and 6. According to the composite score of these 14 parents, the second greatest number of points (122) were recorded reflecting their knowledge of understanding a child's needs based on their responses to item numbers:

1. Young children that are hugged and kissed too much will grow up to be spoiled.

6. Parents who are understanding of their baby's moods and feelings often spoil their children.

The construct of expectations was presented in scenarios #2 and 5. According to the composite score of these 14 parents, a number of points (118) were recorded reflecting their realistic ideas of a child's capabilities based on their responses to numbers:

2. Children six months of age should be able to know what their parents expect of them.

5. Children should be able to take care of their own feeding, clothing, and bathing at an early age.

The construct of role reversal was presented in scenarios #4 and 8. According to the composite score of these 14 parents, the least number of points (110) were recorded based on their responses to item numbers:

4. When their mother is unhappy young children should be expected to hug her.

8. Young children should be responsible for much of their parent's happiness.

Figure #3
Parent-Child Interaction Scenario Composite Scores

Constructs	Scenario	Scenario	Total
Expectations	57	61	118
Empathy	64	58	122
Corporal Punishment	61	62	123
Role Reversal	51	59	110

Parents post test growth scores on the Attitude Inventory were greater than the Attitude Inventory scores from week 2 and week 6 in all four constructs (total of +42) measuring appropriate expectations of children, increase in empathy, decrease in the use of corporal punishment and a decrease in role reversal. These data indicate a positive shift in attitudes in nurturing children among the parents. See Figure 4 for data on the Attitude Inventory Post Test Growth Scores. These 9 parents increased appropriate expectations of children (+14), increased empathy with children (+9), decreased the use of corporal punishment (+17), and decreased role reversals (+2).

Figure #4
Attitude Inventory
Post Test Growth Scores

+14	+9	+17	+2 = +42
-----/-----/-----/-----/-----			
Expectations	Empathy	Corporal Punishment	Role Reversal

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to assess the degree to which the Nurturing Program presented by Parents Anonymous at Sunnyslope Elementary School on February 24 to May 19, 1994, increased parenting skills and coping mechanisms. The sample selected for this study was comprised of 25 individual parents. However, as the study progressed, only 14 of these individual parents attended the required 10 out of 12 sessions of the Nurturing Program and received a certificate of completion from Parents Anonymous. From these 14 individual parents, 9 parents completed all three of the Attitude Inventories on weeks 2, 6, and 11 of the Nurturing Program. All 14 of these individual parents were present on week 10 of the Nurturing Program and completed the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios.

The literature review on child abuse focused on emotional, physical, and sexual maltreatment of children under the age of 18. One basic theme is repeated over and over in the literature; is that individuals who maltreat their children are only acting in the same manner as had their parents (Hart and Brassard, 1987). The known parenting behaviors of abusive parents serve as the basis from which the Nurturing Program development and instruction

emanates. The four constructs of abusive parenting are: Inappropriate Parental Expectations of the Child, Parental Lack of Empathic Awareness of the Child's Needs, Parental Value of Physical Punishment, and Parent-Child Role Reversal (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985). (+12 points) that may have

This study employed a descriptive-evaluative research design. This design was used to assess the degree to which the Nurturing Program increased parenting skills and coping mechanisms in the adults who participated in the program. The instruments used to gather data were the Attitude Inventory (Bavolek and Comstock, 1985) given to the parents on weeks 2, 6, and 11, and the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios designed by the researcher and given to the parents on week 10 of the program. The construct of corporal

The information obtained from the Attitude Inventory was compiled as composite growth scores for the 9 parents that attended the required 10 out of 12 Nurturing Program sessions and completed all three of the Attitude Inventories on weeks 2, 6, and 11 of the program. The composite growth scores indicated +14 points in expectations, +9 points in empathy, +17 points in corporal punishment, and +2 points in role reversal. The total increase was +42 points for all areas tested. Further group data were obtained from the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios. The scenarios composite scores of the 14 parents who completed this instrument on week 10 of the Nurturing Program and attended the required

number of sessions indicated +118 points in expectations, +122 points in empathy, +123 points in corporal punishment, and +110 points in role reversal.

The data generated from the Attitude Inventories represents attitudes or ideas (+42 points) that may have changed during the course of the Nurturing Program. Data generated from the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios represents ideas or attitudes of the parents near the end of the Nurturing Program. However, there does seem to be a relationship between the instruments. On the Attitude Inventory the construct on corporal punishment indicated a composite growth score of +17 points. While on the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios the construct on corporal punishment indicated +123 points. The construct of corporal punishment received the greatest number of points on both instruments. This may indicate that these parents have or are in the process of changing their attitudes on corporal punishment: that hitting children for any reason is abusive and is a learned behavior. Also, on the Attitude Inventory the construct on role reversal indicated a composite score of +2 points. While on the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios the construct on role reversal indicated +110 points. The construct on role reversal received the least number of points on both instruments. This may indicate that these parents have a better understanding of the required

construct of corporal punishment as compared to their understanding of the construct of role reversal.

Conclusions

At the beginning of the Nurturing Program presented at Sunnyslope Elementary School by Parents Anonymous from February 24 to May 19, 1994, there were 25 individual parents enrolled in the program. Out of these 25 parents, 9 (36%) individual parents attended less than the 10 sessions required to receive a certificate of completion for the program. However, 14 parents completed the program, 9 (64.2%) completed the Attitude Inventory on weeks 2, 6, and 11 of the program. Of the 9 parents with 3 test scores, 5 (55.5%) showed a positive increase in parenting skills and coping mechanisms, according to the Attitude Inventory scores. Also, of the 9 parents with 3 test scores, 2 (22.2%) received a slightly negative score (-1), and 2 (22.2%) remained stable. However, one of the parents that remained stable earned a perfect score of 40 on all three tests.

The results of this study are best described as representative of this small sample of participants and, therefore, not appropriate for generalization. However, the results of this study indicate that the Nurturing Program had a positive effect on 5 (55.5%) adults who participated in the program and attended a minimum of 10 of the required 12 sessions in order to receive a certificate of completion

from Parents Anonymous, measuring appropriate expectations of children, increase in empathy, decrease in the use of corporal punishment, and a decrease in role reversal.

Recommendations

This study is based on parental self-reporting. The results of the Attitude Inventory and the Parent-Child Interaction Scenarios are based on the parent's ability to accurately report their level of parenting skills and coping mechanisms. Anastasi (1988) found that self-report instruments are especially subject to malingering or faking. Respondents may be motivated to "fake good," or choose answers that create a favorable situation. To determine if the attitudes reported on the Attitude Inventories convert to changes in behavior, it would be beneficial to gather data from other sources, such as an interview or observation of the entire family demonstrating parenting skills learned during the Nurturing Program.

Recommendations for Further Research

From this study's conclusions and content, two recommendations can be made for future research. This study implies the need for consistent research methodologies and replication to increase the accuracy of the findings and therefore allow for valid conclusions. Future research should continue to explore the link between attitudes about parenting skills and coping mechanisms of the adults who

participate in the Nurturing Program as well as how and if they convert to changes in behavior.

Future research opportunities could also include the development of a standardized test that would be developed specifically for the curriculum of the Nurturing Program. The development of the test would include a measure of its reliability, or the consistency of scores obtained by the same persons when retested with the identical test or with an equivalent form of the test. Also, the development of this test would include a measure of its validity, or the degree to which the test actually measures what it purports to measure.

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APPENDIX A

ATTITUDE INVENTORY

YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE

ATTITUDE INVENTORY

Name _____ Site _____ Date _____

Instruction: Please indicate on the following statements the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement by circling one of the responses located directly under the statement. Use uncertain only when it is absolutely impossible to decide on one of the choices.

1. It is unreasonable to expect children under three years of age to take care of themselves.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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2. Children should be the main source of comfort and care for their parents.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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3. Parents who are sensitive to their children's feelings and moods often spoil their children.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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4. Children seldom learn good behavior through the use of physical punishment.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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5. Parents should expect their children to grow emotionally at about the same rate.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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6. Young children should try to make their parent's life more pleasurable.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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7. Parents who encourage communication with their children only end up listening to complaints.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------	-----------	----------	----------------------

8. Children are less likely to learn appropriate behavior when they are spanked for misbehaving.

Strongly
Agree

Agree

Uncertain

Disagree

Strongly
Disagree

(Bavolek and Comstock, 1985)

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER

APPENDIX C

PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION SCENARIOS

May 12, 1994

Dear Parents,

I am a graduate student at Ottawa University. I am currently involved in collecting information aimed at assessing attitudes toward parenting and child rearing for my Master's thesis. Please help me by answering the following eight statements according to your own opinion. There are no right or wrong answers. All information provided will remain confidential.

Sincerely,

Diane Buchholz

APPENDIX C

PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION SCENARIOS

PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION SCENARIOS

Each of the following eight Scenarios is followed by a Statement that asks for a response using the following:

- 1= strongly agree
- 2= agree
- 3= not sure
- 4= disagree
- 5= strongly disagree

Circle the number that best describes your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers.

Scenario 1: Eleven year old Todd still calls both his mother and father at bedtime to tuck him in and give him a kiss. His father fears that Todd will grow up to be a "sissy."

Statement: Young children that are hugged and kissed too much will grow up to be spoiled.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree

Scenario 2: The mother of a six month old Cora expects her to take her nap each day at noon. For the past several days, Cora has cried uncontrollably for hours at nap time. However, her mother does not return to Cora's room until nap time is over.

Statement: Children six months of age should be able to know what their parents expect of them.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree

Scenario 3: Seven year old Brandon would not sit still during church services. His mother corrected him several times but his wiggling continued. His mother gave him a good spanking when they got home with the thought that Brandon would never be squirmy in church again.

Statement: When children are spanked for misbehaving they are more likely to learn appropriate behavior.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree

Scenario 4: Ten year old Becky's mother came home from work and announced that she just lost her job. When Becky continued to watch her favorite TV show her mother became more and more angry.

Statement: When their mother is unhappy young children should be expected to hug her.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly
agree				disagree

Scenario 5: Three year old Michael's mother told him to fix himself a sandwich for dinner if he was hungry or eat anything else he could find in the cupboards because she had a bad day at work.

Statement: Children should be able to take care of their own feeding, clothing, and bathing at an early age.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly
agree				disagree

Scenario 6: Eighteen month old Carol received a shot at the doctor's office yesterday. Today she has been fussy all day so her mother held Carol and rocked her for several hours.

Statement: Parents who are understanding of their baby's moods and feelings often spoil their children.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly
agree				disagree

Scenario 7: Ten year old Adam asked his mother if he could ride his bike up to the store about a 1/2 mile away to get some candy. His mother refused but he went anyway. When Adam returned home his mother slapped him across the face to teach him a lesson.

Statement: Children should be slapped by their parents when they have done something seriously wrong.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly
agree				disagree

Scenario 8: Five year old Megan's father tells her that he just received a traffic ticket for driving 35 miles an hour through the 15 miles an hour school zone down the street from their home. He became angry when Megan made no reply.

Statement: Young children should be responsible for much of their parent's happiness.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree

I have attended the Nurturing Program presented by Parents Anonymous at Sunnyslope Elementary School. Please check one of the following:

1 to 3 evenings_____

4 to 7 evenings_____

8 to 10 evenings_____

APPENDIX D

EVALUATION OF THE PARENTS ANONYMOUS NURTURING PROGRAM

8 - 12 YEAR OLDS

EVALUATION OF THE PARENTS ANONYMOUS NURTURING PROGRAM

8 - 12 YEAR OLDS

After working for 12 weeks with the 8 - 12 year olds in the Parents Anonymous Nurturing Program, there is no doubt in my mind that it is an effective program in strengthening families. During snack time each evening I had an opportunity to talk with parents who were pleased with the changes in their families after implementing new ideas discovered in the course of the program.

However, as a facilitator with the 8 - 12 year old group, I felt that the curriculum is in need of a major rewrite. Many of the children in my group were far too old and too mature for most of the suggested activities. As a result, many of the children did not enjoy the program and discipline became a problem.

My suggestion would be to include lessons on drug awareness, gangs, and aides for the older children. Also, I would divide the 8 - 12 year old group because the varying age levels are far too diverse. I would advise an 8 - 10 year old class and an 11 - 12 year old class.

APPENDIX E

CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY

It was the second evening of the Nurturing Program. I spotted him in the open air courtyard. It was about 15 minutes before class was scheduled to start. He was smoking a cigarette. As I walked by him, I overheard him say to a young boy, "What do I want? I'll tell you what I want! I want to go home right now! That's what I want!" He had the demeanor of a man who was not at all happy. I wondered if he was missing the basketball game on TV. He was just over six feet tall with black hair slicked neatly away from his tanned, weathered face.

He had on a tight white t-shirt that was stretched over a muscular chest. He had a pack of cigarettes rolled up in his left sleeve, revealing several tattoos up and down both arms.

I was very, very surprised when he came back to class the following week because I had him pegged for a program drop out. I was wrong! He became interested in the class! As the weeks went by he shared a great deal of his struggles with his own children as well as with his growing up years. One evening he said, "When I was growing up, I don't remember even one single happy time. What I remember the most is my parents drinking. They were both always drinking. They beat me too, especially my mom. Until one day when I was about 16. My mom was beating me again. I

was sick of it. So this time I beat her back. Then I walked out and never went back. Now when my girlfriend is nice to the children, I thought she was just babying them. I NEVER KNEW THERE WAS ANOTHER WAY! I NEVER KNEW UNTIL I CAME TO THIS CLASS. BUT I REMEMBER THE WAY I FELT WHEN MY PARENTS DRANK AND BEAT ME. I DON'T WANT THAT FOR MY CHILDREN. SO THE CYCLE STOPS HERE!" Tears spilled down his tanned, weathered face.

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